AUGUST — 1946 — SEPTEMBER

"Where there is no vision the people perish"

THE POETRY REVIEW

THE JOURNAL OF THE POETRY SOCIETY (INCORPORATED)
AND A MAGAZINE OF GENERAL
POETIC INTEREST

▼

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POETS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

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The Poetry Review

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What is Poetry?

SEVERAL writers in THE POETRY REVIEW recently have asked the questions "What is poetry"—"what constitutes poetic quality"—and "what is the difference between poetry and prose," and it was stated: "It is rather late in the day to ask such a question; there are so many views upon it that the query seems almost rhetorical. There is, of course, an answer." Certainly the lengthy list of "definitions, opinions and remarks" on poetry by various eminent writers, sent in by Mr. Arthur Rowe, does not supply an answer, nor apparently was it seriously intended to do that: these clippings from the sayings of great men in no case give a complete definition, more often a comment which equally applies to a dozen or a hundred other things as well as to poetry, or a statement as to what poetry does rather than what it is; if these were intended as definitions, one or two, considering who wrote them, are astonishingly bad, some as far as they go are good, but they were not intended as definitions and we cannot get the kind of answer we want from them.

I have an inclination to precise definition which makes these questions interesting, and as the subject of poetry is particularly interesting, I should find it unsatisfactory, as far as my personal convictions were concerned, to leave them unanswered. I therefore put forward some conclusions I have come to which seem valid to me.

Before we speak of the "quality" of poetry or of the difference between "poetry" and "prose" we must first know what poetry is. It does not suffice to say "the quality of the poetry is the poetry." A quality of anything is an attribute of that thing; a complete definition must name what is essential to all poetry, excluding what is not essential; beyond this are many qualities which may or may not apply to any given poetry. We may speak of "poetic" ideas, "poetic" thoughts, and even give that name to things quite outside the region of poetry, but these sayings apply in so far as they are in conformity with a correct idea of the thing itself.

When we consider the matter, the first conclusion we must come to is that poetry is a form of language. It is not primarily a question of fine thoughts or noble ideas, or indeed of ideas at all, because these occur also in prose.

From an examination of poetry it may be gathered that the particular language in which it is written, while expressing ordinary emotions and thoughts or employed in description, is capable of transforming these from the speech of everyday use into something extremely pleasing and beautiful, therefore we may say that poetry in addition to being verbal expression is in fact language of a unique kind, and that it is this power of adding beauty to ordinary speech which makes it what it is called —poetry.

It may be admitted that poets, perhaps all poets, do possess in addition to this facility of diction, unusual powers of discernment and understanding, but not exclusively; there are thinkers and writers who also possess these gifts; these latter are not poets because they do not write poetry, it is not even apparent that they could do so; I want to make quite clear my contention that poetry is definitely a matter of language, and a poet is a person who is able to write the language of poetry.

It is noticeable that there are writers who apparently attach an indefinable importance to poetry, they refer to it in more or less vague terms as though there were something necessarily incomprehensible about it, and as though a poet possessed gifts almost of an occult nature. He does possess unusual gifts, but they are powers of expression in language.

I assert there is nothing mysterious about poetry as such; we are not entitled to read into it something which it does not possess, which is not stated or implied. A poet may tell us in effect, "I have vague thoughts of wonders and enchantments which are beyond me to do more than hint at." Well and good—"Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard," etc.; that has good poetic quality and is perfectly clear thinking, but if what he actually does say is not clear and understandable, his poem is to that extent at fault because every poet should have his thoughts sufficiently clear to be able to state them plainly. There has been a good deal of wordy nonsense written about poets and poetry, but I find the greater the poet the more understandable he is; inefficient obscurity is no valid ground for assumption of mystery. This is, of course, not to say that there may not be allusions in a poem beyond the knowledge of a reader; I am speaking of the language, not of the implications, which in good poetry states clearly the poet's thoughts.

He may use a word with an uncommon meaning (which unless justified is not a merit), but when the meaning is in conformity with the context he cannot be accused of obscurity.

We have been told that "poetic quality" has never been satisfactorily defined and perhaps is indefinable. I submit there is a difference to be drawn between "poetry" and "poetic quality," but a good definition of poetry would at the same time furnish a satisfactory idea of the nature of poetic quality. Let us see how far my argument has progressed, assuming a valid argument and that there has been progression.

Poetry is language of a particular kind. Beautiful thoughts until expressed in words are not poetry, it is only when they cease to be mere thoughts and are expressed in suitable words that they become poetry; it is in the rendering of them into language that the art of poetry consists and upon which the success or otherwise of the poet's endeavour depends. A poet, who I take it is a person with power to express fine thoughts finely and metrically, will have a natural predilection for a subject which lends itself to poetic feeling.

Doubtless he might, if he so wished, write a poem upon what might be primarily a purely mechanical subject and produce something presentable. He might I suppose, by his treatment of a subject on the face of it unpromising, so transform it from its original limited or even repugnant conception, as to embrace ideas more or less related to it, but going beyond it into the realms of fancy, for it is from the sphere of fancy and imagination that poetry springs; such a transformation might enable a subject previously regarded as unfitted for poetic treatment to become capable of

giving pleasure in the poet's presentation of it, but the language of poetry is seen to be peculiarly suited for the presentation of imaginative rather than merely material subjects.

Lest it be objected later that I am attempting to debase the sovereign quality of poetry by restricting it to the mechanical operation of verbal composition and excluding those higher powers of the intellect which mark off the poet from the writer who is not a poet, I say now, it is in the judicious selection of the appropriate words that the higher powers of the intellect are in fact employed, that the art of poetry does consist in their employment in this way, and that the whole range of thought does lie open to the poet to be drawn upon when with discrimination he chooses words.

Before inquiring further let us examine one or two verses from a reputable poem, so well known and of such surpassing quality that it needs no introduction.

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way
And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

Now this is a description which in every detail might have been written in prose, but can anyone write the prose which will have the same effect?

"Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight
Or drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

Is there not something singularly appropriate in this language to the scene depicted; the mild accentuation, the subtle cadence, the gentle insistence of the rhyme and rhythm, especially the perfect artistry of the concluding lines of each stanza, though indeed all is exquisitely rendered. I confess a great admiration for the poem of which these two verses are the commencement, it seems to me a satisfactory example of simple language employed in describing a natural scene, fulfilling perfectly the functions of poetry.

Although justification for using poetry rather than prose may, I think, be properly based upon the opportunity it provides for presentation of chosen thoughts in more pleasing and even unique language, alone capable of giving so beautiful expression to them, I would not assert that herein is the difference between poetry and prose; that I contend definitely lies in the form of the language itself. The fact that it is better qualified to describe particular scenes, events and emotions, is an effect or quality of this form, it does not constitute the form; if we find the form without any corresponding beauty of thought or idea embodied in it, we are entitled to say, this is indeed the verbal mechanism of poetry, but it is misused; conversely if we find beauty of thought, richness of metaphor and vivid presentment of fine sentiments written in language other than that of poetry, we are entitled to say these are poetic ideas, meaning thereby that these expressions are akin to similar thoughts or ideas expressed in poetry, the difference between them being that in the one case they are in the language of poetry, in the other they are not, and that is the difference between poetry and prose. I think this is a logical conclusion.

If people prefer the medium of prose to that of poetry, that is no reason why

they should name as poetry what does not conform to the standards of poetry or perhaps to any standards. It may be objected why employ such words as "standards" or "conformity" when discussing the work of a writer intent on free expression?

I would point out that prose is also subject to certain standards, but unless definitely claiming to be poetry, there could be no reference to its governing principles.

The fact seems to be that if you put your sentiments into prose, however poetical you may judge them to be, they will remain prose.

For quite a long time now nations ancient and modern have regarded a certain technique of language as appertaining to poetry, and they have not usually considered as poetry writing outside that technique. At the same time the form does not remain rigidly static, as witness the course of English poetry from Langland to the present time.

But there are essentials without which poetry loses its particular powers of expression, and in the absence of which it loses form and ceases to be poetry.

I suppose the accepted forms of verse which have developed during the progress of poetry have been a more or less natural growth out of and lending itself to the sentiments involved, and poetry is an effort to attune words and sounds to thoughts and ideas. Certain well-known principles have developed in the process; measured lines, rhyme, accent and rhythm are recognised features of expression.

Poetry then is language governed by these principles, prose not being in conformity with them. The composition of a line in poetry, not consisting merely of counted syllables, is related to values of words and accent and the resulting rhythm; it seems to me that this distinction is not only in accordance with fact, but is the only distinction that can definitely be made which is applicable to all poetry.

When stating the difference between poetry and prose in a previous number of this Review, I said: "this difference consists in the language of poetry being expressed in lines of measured and duly accented words forming a sequence of rhythmical sounds, as opposed to prose which is not so expressed." Possibly there might be objection to this definition as tending to limit the function of poetry to mere mechanical dexterity: the limitation is concerned with the kind of language used in poetry as contrasted with prose. May I quote a few lines more of what I wrote previously.

"I would make it quite plain I do not imply that the mere observance of these conditions will of itself result in poetry. In all the gradations from verse to fine poetry I think these conditions apply and that poetry cannot be written apart from compliance with them; they constitute the means by which it may be brought into being when the mind of the poet, his ideas and words attuned harmoniously, catches faint echoes of 'inexpressive' thoughts, or when homely utterance of things which lie close to humanity's heart, captures our fancy." I now claim to have answered sufficiently the question "What is the difference between poetry and prose?"

Has the definition just quoted sufficiently answered the question "What is Poetry?"

Slightly altered thus: "Poetry is language expressed in lines, etc." I think it would be getting close to an adequate definition: there are essential conditions, however, which remain to be stated. I suppose by universal consent, poetry is considered to be essentially concerned with the imagination, with truth and with beauty. I will therefore once again alter my definition to its final form thus: "Poetry is imaginative

language in accord with truth and beauty, expressed in lines of measured and duly accented words forming a sequence of rhythmical sounds."

This acknowledges honoured convention and old tradition on the one hand, and on the other embraces all which fancy and imagination may make clear.

There still remains the further question, "What is poetic quality?" Fairly obviously, from my point of view, poetic quality must consist of such attributes as come under the definition of poetry written above; an enumeration of qualities, without an understanding on the subject of which they may or may not be a part, would not suffice.

Essential qualities are few and of wide application; accidental qualities are many and individual and come within the rule of the essentials.

When it is said that "poetic quality" is indefinable, I am not able to agree because I think it is sufficiently defined in what I have written, but this is not to imply that I look upon poetic quality as something that cannot be profitably and pleasurably discussed. What I have had in mind is that certain questions were raised, and those, for the reason stated, I have endeavoured to answer.

RAYMUND BOURNE.

Leopardi

I TRY to let the stares run through me.
The field-workers, resting upon their hoes,
And the cat-callers in the street
See what they see: I pass alone, unnoticed.

Only the eyes of women have that power
To set my mirrored self before myself.
Dark with shame, then I grudge bitterly
My dour youth, my unheeded life.

A passing girl's gentle disregard
Has, in a moment, crumbled my thought's towers;
Changed Eternity to a poor suburb
Of her instant, dazzling city.

Yet life is not unsweet.
Sometimes, the flesh fading in solitude's
Gulf, this universe of stars and sighs
Turns round on the axis of my heart.

Then it is pleasant to go unregarded
Up to the hill-field by the quiet path;
Well that you scarcely heed me as I walk,
Softly, in and out of your house, my father.

N. K. Cruickshank.

Confluence

STANDING together; a tide of golden light
Flowing from each to each; face to face, spirit to spirit;
Each in the other his wide horizon beholding;
In our hands
No tangible gift, only the harvest
Brought home by the questing spear of the mind,
The gathering net of the heart,
The ranging star of the soul.

Standing thus,
What shall we say? Wrought words of a poet?
Words of a lover? Words of a trusted friend?
No. We are all these, yet shall we say
No words; the secret strings of the heart
Shall waken to music—a ripple of sound that spreads
In ripples of light to smite the echoing stars.
That frail bubble of glass, the world,
That must break with its ringing shall never hear it.
Only to you and to me
When the strings are touched and muted again shall the following silence
Carry the overtones—gossamer bands made fast,
Anchored between us.

Christina Chapin.

Siegfried

In *People on Our Side* Edgar Snow tells of photographs of pretty girls found scattered round the corpses of German soldiers lying frozen in Stalingrad. Translated, the writing on one of them read: "Kill me a Russian, Siegfried."

"KILL me a Russian, Siegfried,
Leave him still and cold."
Poor tangled hands, now older
Than danger and death are old.
"Seize the Siberian, Siegfried,
And wrap his sinews in frost."
Rigid as winter his features,
His smile like the smile of a ghost.
"Stab his heart, bold Siegfried,
And spill its blood on the snow."
Ragged as want there the tunic
Where the reddening circles show.
"Kill me a Russian, Siegfried,
But come you back home to me."
Siegfried is dead, mein Fräulein,
And Russia will yet be free.

Beverly Hills, California. *Mary Cornell.*

Memories

SOMETIMES the brush of memory
Paints with undimmed glow
The ineffaceable moments
When my love and I did go
As one through days of beauty
Tenderness and bliss
And time stayed, spell-poised, shining
In glance and touch and kiss.

Beyond an arch of beeches
The grey church drew inside
Its ancient, white-washed stillness
The blue, enchanted tide
Of love that bathed the altar,
Lit with offerings of flowers,
With a soft, transmuted spirit
In the magic, evening hours.

High on a grassy cliff top
We watched the pearly haze
Of sea and sky pale-merging
And then we turned to gaze
Till glances fused together,
Another sea and sky,
And this I shall remember
Both now and when I die.

For death, they say, makes clearer
The pictures in each store
And blows the dusty cobwebs
Till the canvas glows once more.
I would take my pictures with me
Where memories live on
To another heart and altar,
Another tide and sun.

D. R. W. Carr.

To Mercia

WHAT flooding image tides my twilit sleep?
What turmoil stirs my wakening mind?
Is it the sound of falls that weep
Beyond my curtained couch, or wind
That sighs and calls, among the pine
Upon the slopes of Cannich; or light
From southing sun, which darts across my blind.
No none of these may stay my sudden flight:
Only a haunting vision I call wife,
Only an irridescent flame of arid life.

Rodney Farquhar-Thomson.

Embarkation Leave

HOW shall I tell you
In so short a while,
Whose high endeavour
Is graced with your smile?

What can mere words do,
Other than beat
At the heart's portal,
Doomed to defeat?

Is not Love's silence
When words are spent,
Stronger and deeper,
More eloquent?

How shall I tell you?
Is it not sung,
Those whom the gods love,
They shall die young?

This be your comfort
And staff by the way,
We are immortal,
Even as they!

Noel A. Jones.

Unfinished Ballad

THERE were three of us that same morning,
Michael and Shaun and I.
And never a thought was in our heads
As we went riding by
That Shaun and he must die.

Michael lies at the crossroads
With neither flower nor stone,
Nor any priest to bless his corpse
And never a woman's groan,
He lies there by his lone.
Red Shaun is buried near the sea
Where the gulls they wheel and cry,
And ships that sail for distant shores
See, as they pass it by
A cairn against the sky.

And I have left my youth behind
Where the grey gulls wheel all day,
And left my heart in the cold earth
At the meeting of the way
Where there is none to pray.

L. E. Brodie.

American Eagles

Missing . . . reported lost—2nd Lieut. John Tasse Slater, U.S. Army Air Corps, Nov. 1942

THE light of distant constellations
Is mirrored in the eyes of American Eagles,
Those pilots of the skies who roam
At home and overseas, in the night's deep dome
Searching for the common foe.

Calm of face, knowing no fear
They test their skill free of the limit
Of Time and place; guided through space
On uncharted ways by planets and stars.

Venus, Mars, the Pleiades and Southern Cross
Have given them measurement unhampered
By value of gain or loss. Time is just
The instant for action, Now and Here. A cosmic law
Which mariners have known before.

Should they be lost from sight, we must not
Call them dead—they are winging on ahead
Not far. This galaxy is hidden in nebulae
Like a star.

Erica May Brooks.

To a Lady Going to England

I MAY not climb, except in memory,
To watch the white birds dipping to the sea,
Nor walk that early way in Lyonesse,
When gold and bronze and heart-stain were its dress
For Old Year in the beeches. You will tread
Sometimes, the common green, or crown your head
Unwitting, with the ivy where you stoop
To pluck a blossom; though the berries droop
Beyond my gathering, the rainy red
Shall be your harvest, and a deeper stain—
For you will tell me when you come again,
And I shall see our Autumn as I list,
And hear the sea-horns crying in a mist,
And feel against my face the Channel rain.

James Puit.

For 1946

DO not tell me where your dead are laid,
With marks of stone and words I cannot read.
I seek them out unled and am not stayed
By meanness, or neglect, or lack of creed.

I weave the roots of grass into their ground.
I fleck its green with bright untended bloom.
I call sweet birds and gentle beasts to sound
Their gladness without care against its gloom.

And do not tell your grief for me to hear.
I come uncalled and go with you along
What way you choose, and have you ever near
Where colours flash and noise is rich with song.

I am the surge and pulse you know as life,
Who will unedge and hold your sorrow's knife.

George Hughes

Evening on the Moray Firth

ACROSS the Moray Firth the interlude
Of twilight tunes the orchestra of night,
As melody, dark-toned from heather shadows
Sweeps from the sea last remnants of the light.

Soft laps the wind the language of the waters,
And sweeping as a harpist on the strings,
Moans melancholy in the pines and fir tops,
A darkening tone of tossing murmurings.

The shoulders of the mountains sink in shadow,
Bare boulders fade in outline mistily.
And the Black Isle still nearer, looms as nature
Clasps her dark opal in a slate-grey sea.

The twilight music dies, and night's crescendo,
By the sea-gulls' sad clamour hastening brings
Against their high, weird fretfulness of crying,
The orchestrated tumult of wild wings.

Priscilla H. McIlwaine.

My Room

OUT of bleak weather, at the dull day's close
I come, despondent, to my lonely room.
And, oh, what sudden charm transmutes the gloom,
What gold and jasper through the twilight glows?

'Tis iris, jasmine, little waifs of rose,
That love has rescued from the garden's doom,
And primrose, sweet as any April bloom,
Bewitching Winter out of all his woes.

There is a rest-room in my inmost heart,
A little bower against the storm and cold,
Where I may come to dream with thee apart
Of days when Love and I went primrosing,
While memories, like lovely flowers, unfold
The scent and promise of the eternal Spring.

R. G. Duff.

To a Snowdrop

THE only immortality is thine,
Frail little lily, come ere yet the snow
His cloak of white has lifted from the pine.
First come art thou, and first to die, and so,
Not seeing death, thou diest unaware
Of that strange influence, whose very thought
Makes other lives but bitter things to bear,
Their brightest moments each with shadow fraught.
Thine is the only life to envy, then,
O thou who never must endure the ill
Of knowing beauty low in ashes when
That unrelenting force has wrought his will,
Untroubled herald of the hopeful spring,
Who diest ere the disillusioning.

Neill Wells.

Oh, Will You Hurt My Sleeping Yet?

OH will you hurt my sleeping yet
Who went from me this many a day
With all the words you used to say
That for my peace I would forget?

They reach me in the silence still,
The words you were so quick to find,
That edged the pathways of my mind
As pinks in sunny gardens will.

I hear them in the winds that weep
About the sweet syringa tree,
And when the blackbird sings—Ah me,
I hear them, and I shall not sleep. *Phyllis Lyth.*

Black Cat in Church

PROWLING on silken, silent paws
Beneath the chancel rail,
He numbers those who kneel in prayer
And swings a thoughtful tail.

Crouching as sooty and sleek as sin
Before the altar stone,
He turns his tail upon the light
And looks the devil's own.

Fearing the parson, close at hand,
Will sternly exorcise him,
He plans to gather certain souls
Before his Reverence spies him. *Eleanor Glenn Wallis.*

Faith and The Sword

THE stream of history has now been turned
Into the boundless ocean of the free;
Humanity, in travail, now has learned
That war is better than base tyranny.
Faith has not failed before the firing-squad,
And life to those is not accounted dear
Who see in strife the holy Face of God,
And in the surge of battle find Him near.
The sword itself is powerless to re-build;
Its virtue is the evil to destroy;
With faith and love our spirits must be filled
If we would see the city of our joy;
The sword shall make foul tyranny to cease,
That we may live in justice and in peace. *T. Pittaway.*

My Harp Sang

I RIPPLED my fingers
over my harp strings
and my harp sang to me
cascades of melody
sparkling like mountain streams
sprinkled with sunbeams.

Sometimes my fingers
would idle and ramble
down in the sounding deeps:
then my harp sang to me
sad songs like muffled bells
tolling at Eventide.

Then as the mood changed
I would strike swelling chords
martial and resonant,
and my harp sang to me
songs of grim warriors,
of shield, sword and battle-axe;
chants of dark storm clouds
on lordly Plinlimmon;
tables of the mountains,
of Geraint and Moelwyn;
of mighty Arenig
lonely and arrogant,
of Berwyn's soft purple
and gold in the Autumn;
of Bran and his armies
encastled in Cloudland.

My harp sang of white waves
that crashed on the shingles
and red cliffs of Penmon.
It sang of the rivers
Of Clwyd and Conway,
of Dee and her valleys,
of brooks like gay children
that laughing and playing
ran down the green hillsides.
It sang of fair women
of daughters of Cymry
with cheeks like ripe apples
with wind-tossing tendrils
of red-gold, caressing
brows white as may-blossom.
It sang of pale maidens,
the white girls of Arvon
asleep 'neath the snowdrops.

Its strings rang enraptured
with songs of green April,
with songs of blue June days,
of russet Septembers
white Winters and snowdrifts
and sea-winds and sea-birds:
of high clouds like placid swans
mirrored like ghost birds
in pine-shadowed waters.

The sea-breezes listened;
the restless trees heard me
and swung low their branches.

Down by the dark river
the bulrushes listened
and all the stars listened,
and danced to my music,
but Man would not listen,
His sons and his daughters
were deafened and maddened
by noises primaeval,
and lost in the clamour
and reek of the Jungle.

* * *

High on the gray wall
my wild harp hangs lonely
her strings snapped and tangled,
and silent her singing;
. . . my fingers are frozen.

William Booth.

Unholy Sonnets

"SCORN not the sonnet", said Wordsworth. But few poets, before or since his time, have needed that advice. They have accepted sonnets only too readily. They have written them on anything and everything, from death and religion to their "mistress' eyebrow". Some, like Ronsard and Shakespeare, have used a translucent simplicity of phrase. Others, like Manley Hopkins, or the Donne of the Holy Sonnets, have packed the sonnet with subtle complexity of thought. Between them, they have written enough serious sonnets to fill several weighty anthologies.

But not all sonnets *are* serious. The very respectability of the form—and of such practitioners as Milton and Wordsworth!—has encouraged the composition of sonnets which are satirical or facetious. Shakespeare seems to have begun it when he ridiculed the extravagance of simile in Elizabethan sonnets, and at the same time repaid the "dark lady" for the physical hold she had upon him:—

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

That sonnet seldom gains admittance to anthologies. Nor does the following one by Keats on bagpipe music. It will be remembered that, while walking with Brown in Scotland, he saw a performance of a play called "The Stranger" to the accompaniment of the bagpipe. The result perhaps explains why most Scotsmen prefer Burns:—

Of late two dainties were before me placed,
Sweet, holy, pure, sacred and innocent,
From the ninth sphere to me benignly sent
That gods might know my own particular taste.
First the soft bagpipe mourned with zealous haste;
The Stranger next, with head on bosom bent,
Sighed; rueful again the piteous bagpipe went;
Again the Stranger sighings fresh did waste.
O Bagpipe! thou didst steal my heart away—
O Stranger! thou my nerves from pipe didst charm—
O Bagpipe! thou didst re-assert thy sway—
Again thou Stranger gav'st me fresh alarm.
Alas! I could not choose. Ah, my poor heart,
Mum chance art thou with both obliged to part.

His friend, Leigh Hunt, had a fondness for sonnets. It was he who persuaded Keats and Shelley to write their sonnets on the Nile, and he and Keats wrote rival poems on "The Grasshopper and the Cricket". But he also wrote this extraordinary "Iterating Sonnet" when there was talk of war between England

and the United States. It is not only a *tour de force*, but it captures the very intonation of a political controversy:—

War between England and the United States!
Impossible! Pshaw! Stuff!—"United States!"
Why, they themselves are the United States:
London and Boston are United States:
New York and Liverpool United States:
Cotton and spinning very United States:
Progress and liberty, United States:
Their names, fames, books, bloods, all United States.
But "bloods are up" in the United States?
Well:—wouldst have 'low' bloods in the United States?
No: high bloods—high—in both United States:
So high that, seeing their United States,
They scorn to stoop from such United States
Solely to please poor *dis*-United States.

Another poet of that day, Thomas Hood, besides his well-known sonnets to Keats and silence, perpetrated this heartless one "To a Decayed Seaman":—

Hail! seventy-four cut down! Hail, top and lop!
Unless I'm much mistaken in my notion,
Thou wast a stirring tar before that hop
Became so fatal to thy locomotion.
Now, thrown on shore, like a mere weed of ocean,
Thou readest still to men a lesson good,
To King and Country showing thy devotion,
By kneeling thus upon a stump of wood.
Still is thy spirit strong as alcohol,
Spite of that limb, begot of acorn-egg.
Methinks—thou Naval History in one vol.—
A virtue shines, e'en in that timber leg,
For, unlike others that desert their Poll,
Thou walkest ever with thy "Constant Peg!"

Perhaps the most amusing example in our own time has been by Rupert Brooke. His "Sonnet Reversed" starts triumphantly with the final couplet about the lovers:—

Hand trembling towards hand; the amazing lights
Of heart and eye. They stood on supreme heights.

and ends like a pricked balloon with this description of their family:

The eldest Jane, who married Mr. Bell,
William, the head clerk in the County Bank,
And Henry, a stock-broker, doing well.

But no Unholy Sonnet, old or new, equals the poem by a madman which Michael Roberts prints in the *Faber Book of Comic Verse*. It is entitled "Sonnet in a Deserted Madhouse" and runs as follows:—

Oh, that my soul a marrow-bone might seize!
For the old egg of my desire is broken.
Spilled is the pearly white and spilled the yolk, and
As the mild melancholy contents grease
My path, the shorn lamb baas like bumblebees.
Time's trashy purse is as a taken token,
Or like a thrilling recitation spoken

By mournful mouths filled full of mirth and cheese.
And yet, why should I clasp the earthful urn?
Or find the frittered fig that felt the fast?
Or choose to chase the cheese around the churn?
Or swallow any pill from out the past?
Ah, no, Love! not while your hot kisses burn
Like a potato riding on the blast.

It is, of course, more pathetic than comic, but if the writer was insane, he was undoubtedly a poet. (Did he, like John Clare, find some consolation in the fact?) And technically it is an interesting piece of work. "Time's trashy purse" is almost a forerunner of Manley Hopkins: so is the rhyming of "broken" and "yolk and". "Oh that my soul a marrow-bone might seize" anticipates the early trancelike poems of Dylan Thomas. Only what Hopkins, Thomas and Brooke gained by choice, he, poor fellow, achieved by compulsion. He must have been full of conflicting ideas, and wrote those lines in an attempt to resolve them. Much good may it have done him. R.I.P.!

CLIVE SANSOM.

Rain in Summer

OUT of these windows gazing,
Hearkening back
To memories sad and mazing
I saw the track

Of rain on the clear panes, pencilled
Like angel-writing. Sweet
Is the first of July's stencilled
Message, through heat,

Through bombs of war, spoken
In subtlest whispers, as she
Who made a whole life from a broken,
Scarred thing, for me:

Made possible the summer song,
The autumn ode,
Friendship, and all that keeps one strong
On the echoing road.

Arthur W Ball.

Snipe

"THE poetry of earth is never dead";
So Keats once said.
Of late returning through the melting snow,
I heard a solitary snipe his shrill flute blow,
Whistling by beck-course and by flooded field.
So bears the breast of song its three-fold shield
Of brass and bull's hide on the frozen lea ;
And, like a blackbird in adversity,
The moorland snipe sustains earth's minstrelsy.

T. E. Casson.

Mirage

STILL the old magic works: and still,
Heart of my heart, we know it vain.
They die, on this enchanted plain,
Lily and rose and daffodil;
No wheat will ripen here to grain,
No angels' tears will ever fill
The phantom clouds that haunt the hill:
But we shall come this way again.

We shall come back, with eager tread,
To count each summer star that pales
In the false dawn, while nightingales
Sing the old glory overhead,
And nothing any more avails
To silence hope; though hope is fled,
And only ghosts are never dead,
And only failure never fails.

Barbara Lea.

Day's End

THE wind cries and the shadow
Broods upon the meadow.

Leisurely, through shrinking skies,
A single, speckled pigeon flies
On comfortable wing
To the green gloom's welcoming.

Oh, hear the waves of night
Encroach upon the light
And break, in empty curves of sound,
On drooping tree and quiet mound,
On farm and inoffensive beast
Dreaming of to-morrow's feast.

The wind sighs and the shadow
Bites into the meadow.

With curious call the owls ride
The hidden crest of eventide;
Beast and building, tree and mound,
In an ebon sea are drowned;
And through the dew-wet grass and deep
Man goes home to his long sleep.

The wind dies, and the shadow
Swallows up the meadow.

Wilfred H. Bartlett.

Wordsworth As Critic

A RE-EXAMINATION

An accurate taste in poetry and in all the arts . . . is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by serene thought and a long-continued intercourse with the best models of composition.

"I am not a critic", Wordsworth once remarked, "and set little value upon the art." Professional critic he was not, but as a poet, and especially as a poet of a new era in English literature, he could not fail to have something momentous to say about poetry as a form of art, and about his own poetry which was so much a part of him. The best judge of poetry should be a poet, and Wordsworth was no exception. Any doubt of his ability to discern genius and appreciate poetic achievement is dispelled in the perusal of his poetry. Few poets, probably, in English, had so much to say of their own kind and none—with the possible exception of Pope (and he with far less sublimity)—has so adequately phrased the sum of their achievements. He possessed the singular felicity of epigrammatic sentences which illuminate the character and genius of an author in a revealing flash. Where else is the gentleness of the Elizabethan master so ravishingly described as in

> Sweet Spenser moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft peace,

or the defiant grandeur of the Puritan Milton so vigorously portrayed as with

> Yea, our blind poet, who in later day
> Stood almost single, uttering odious truth,
> Darkness before and danger's voice behind?

Genuine appreciation of Milton was, and still is, a touchstone of critical integrity and the sincerity of Wordsworth's admiration is made manifest by the frequent, though never obtrusive Miltonic reminiscences of his own poetry.

Of the other great giant of English literature he was no less aware. Does he not say of Shakespeare's sonnets that "in no part of the writings of this poet is found an equal number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed", a verdict which other and greater critics have not hesitated to endorse. So with the merits of his contemporaries Wordsworth was equally certain in his judgment.

> I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
> The sleepless soul that perished in his pride.

Words such as these completely express the sense of loss coupled with the firm consciousness of immortality which the memory of Chatterton's untimely death must bring. Wordsworth felt very especially too the spirit

> Of him who walked in glory and in joy
> Behind his plough upon the mountain side.

These lines, with the "Address to the Sons of Burns" written after visiting their father's grave in 1803 evince in striking fashion his realisation of the just claims of Burns' poetry to fame and his sympathetic, if slightly sentimental understanding of the tragedy of Burns' mortal life. This admiring appreciation of the worth of the Scots poet, of which Wordsworth writes so movingly in discussing literary monuments, marks him out at once in his age as a critic of individual taste and advanced judgment. Yet there remain those who deny to Wordsworth the moral right of criticism on grounds of insufficient learning.

It is true that Wordsworth was not learned to the point of erudition, but he had read widely and contemplatively in ancient and contemporary literature.

He was cultured enough to enjoy the charm of Latin poetry, he had got by heart the great manifestations of divinity in the Elizabethans and Milton. He had, in addition, what was more important for his immediate purpose—the firm idea of a poetic destiny for himself. His heart might lie in the coffin with Shakespeare and Milton but he did not pause long ere he caught it back to him and set himself to propagate the good influence of their work. He was sorrowfully conscious that judgment was fled, so to speak, to brutish beasts, and for all the talk of an "age of reason" men had been nose-led by mistaken emphasis on the notion of "good taste".

It is essential to remember that Wordsworth was a rebel among poets even as Milton had been. He felt very keenly the constraint which had fallen on the English muse and ached to restore her liberty. An inhuman dearth of noble natures caused him to cry

> Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters.

The inclination to revolt was strengthened by events at home and abroad: fired with revolutionary ardour youth could go far:

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
> But to be young was very heaven: O times
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law and statute took at once
> The attraction of a country in Romance.

That this ardour later deserted Wordsworth is a matter for regret though not for blame. The excesses of revolutionary protagonists whom he had previously admired could not but modify in him, as in other sensitive Englishmen, the first enthusiasms for a new order among mankind. Such a reaction ensured that in his criticism judgments were balanced and not inclined to the extreme or absurd as those of Byron and Shelley too often were. The stream of his comment welled from natural springs and remained to the end clear and untramelled.

The aims of Wordsworth's criticism cannot be understood without remembering what it was he was in revolt against and one must begin with his opinions on the established order in poetry and literature generally. He writes—"to what low state knowledge of the most obvious and important phenomena had sunk is evident from the style in which Dryden has executed a description of night in one of his tragedies and Pope in translating the celebrated moonlight scene in *The Iliad*. A blind man in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him might easily depict these appearances with more truth. Dryden's lines are vague, bombastic and senseless: those of Pope, though he had Homer to guide him, are thoroughly false and contradictory". This was a nice indictment of the "correct" verse of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth felt, as most lovers of poetry must feel, that the Augustan age lacked some vital power, had not caught the spark from heaven. He comes very near to the secret of its failure in analysing the reasons for Pope's success. He was too easy to read, too readily understood: he secured for himself immediate popularity at the price of lack of nature. "He bewitched the nation by his melody and dazzled it by his polished style and was himself blinded by his own success." Readers were pleased with the ornament in the verse of Pope and his imitators—they cared less for what lay at its root. And Wordsworth held, rightly, that poetry ought to "mean" something, not to be

a mere exercise in the manipulation of words. The "poetic diction" of the time arose out of the misapplication of the principles employed by Milton who himself used words with a special and very personal significance: but the "russet lawns and fallows grey" of his earlier poetry became catchwords for less capable imitators. The greater part of Pope's work is petty and mean beside his, and it was partly this sense of a dignity lacking in poetry which Wordsworth wished to remove.

Wordsworth was sceptical also of the symptoms of pseudo-Romanticism in English literature of the late eighteenth century, in the "novel of terror", in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and in other efforts based on the supernatural. This "strangeness added to beauty" was not the least important feature of the Romantic revival but Wordsworth was right to distrust the examples of imagination allowed to run riot. At times, and especially with Coleridge, the influence led to the production of pieces of sheer beauty still united with and held to earth by sincere feeling and the knowledge born of real experience. But poetry cannot be allowed to depend for its effect solely upon hyperbole—it must appeal to the feelings. Referring to the great impression made on the public by Thomson's *Seasons* Wordsworth maintains its effect was due almost entirely to its being "something new". "Wonder is the natural product of ignorance", and the success of *The Seasons* was due, firstly, to its title, further, to "A vicious style, false ornaments, such as strike the undiscerning, sentimental commonplaces brought forward with an air of novelty".

It is easy to see from these and similar pronouncements what Wordsworth considered were the shortcomings of recent and contemporary poetry. His constructive criticism had, unfortunately, not so much power as feeling—perhaps it was too much to expect a complete exposition from a poet in his position. But with the aid of his poetry and the work of later critics it is possible to trace his aims and conceptions. He realised that to be recognised as a poet he must fare forth also as a prophet: "every author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed". To this end he added the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* and composed his other essays in criticism—pleas for consideration rather than explicit defences against anticipated attacks.

This poet naturally believed that the first aim of poetry is to give pleasure, whether in simple beauty or in more purely intellectual complexities, or feelings heightened by the elevating influence of tragedy. It was a characteristically Romantic conception and one which gradually gained wide acceptance. It led him instinctively to declare that "It is the honourable characteristic of poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind". The end of poetry, as of all art, was to be sublimity, and while some subjects were less susceptible of poetic treatment than others the achievement of the poet was the greater as the susceptibility was less. It could not be denied that everything was fit subject for poetry. "The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of the critics but in those of the poets themselves".

What, he asks then, is the origin of poetry? The poet. And what *is* a poet? His first qualification is a capacity to feel, to experience emotions and sensations either not granted to all men or impressed on their minds in a lower degree. The poet is in a sense an inspired being, speaks as the priest of the high gods and as one having authority. He is one who can gaze at an imprisoned thrush in the dim promise of dawn and see not alone the dreary walls and squalid tenements of a God-forsaken slum but a heavenly vision of a mountain ascending, bright

volumes of faery vapour gliding through the hollow of a street of chapmen, cleansed by a river which flows whence he cares not and whither he knows not. When we read, we see the vision too, but not always without the elixir of the poet's verse.

> The stream will not flow and the hill will not rise,
> And the colours have all passed away from our eyes.

Wordsworth believed, then, that poetry springs first of all from observation. This was an essential, but following upon it and of the greatest vital force in the production of poetry, was "sensibility"—the gift of sympathising with all that pertained to life. "All poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". But this must be qualified if poetry is to be likewise truth, by reflection. Poetry takes its origin also from "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Wordsworth suggests, further, that "the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears and an emotion kindred to that which was previously the subject of contemplation, is produced and does itself actually exist in the mind".

This is a valiant attempt on Wordsworth's part to explain the repercussions of much of his own poetic experience. But does it add anything to the sum of our understanding? Granted that emotion may be contemplated, is there any final or essential distinction for purposes of poetry between emotion and recollected emotion? It is, surely, not the recollection of feeling which in itself occasions a recurrence of that feeling but the recollection of what inspired it—the old, forgotten, far-off things, familiar matters of to-day, natural sorrow, loss or pain. Recollections such as are the inspiration of the poet arise in the first place from simple causes, the mere striking of a chord of memory. Whether Wordsworth intended us to understand just what his words seem to convey is another matter, but on the face of them they seem to draw to no other useful conclusion than that good poetry is the outcome of a calm mood, the mood always to be associated with real feeling because

> Passions are likened best to floods and streams
> The shallow murmur but the deep are dumb.

So much for the water at the bottom of the well—what of the walls? Wordsworth follows Sidney and anticipates Shelley in asserting that verse is no essential to poetry, that elevated prose will serve as its vehicle equally well. He draws, too, the valuable distinction that poetry is the opposite, not of prose, but of science, and the opposite of prose, metre. It is certainly true that the terms prose and metre refer primarily to the form and not to the spirit of any piece of literature, and that the natural tendency of poetry to employ metre and of science to express its faith in prose has given rise to a certain confusion of terminology. We may not deny that what passes for prose is no bar to poetic utterance. When Blackmore likens the patches of snow left unmelted in the crevices of a rock to "a lady's gloves left behind", and when Thomas Hardy sees lifted in the stormy clouds of night a "forgotten patch of daylight" we are conscious of the sublimity which is the end of poetry. Wordsworth claims that metre is "a charm superadded to poetry". But metre, in one sense of the term, is an indispensable of poetry simply because passionate and poetic utterance falls easily into a metre of its own.

The first stanza of "Simon Lee" runs—

> In the sweet shire of Cardigan
> Not far from pleasant Ivor Hall,
> An old man dwells, a little man
> 'Tis said he once was tall.

This is scarcely poetry, and if it were not written in verse form would never be suspected of being so. But read Hamlet's advice to the players, the lament of David over Jonathan, or the descriptive passages in *Westward Ho!*—and here is poetry. The form is the form of prose but one may be aware of a subtle sense of rhythm, of ebb and flow, balance and recurrence of impulse. It is this rhythm that is the essential of poetry, not metre, which implies a regular and scientifically constructed rhythm. It is easy to discover the passages of greatest poetic value in the language and very little consideration of them will show that the bounds of metre are too often broken, but that rhythm always remains.

> Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours
> And moments aye divided by keen pangs
> Till they seemed years; torture and solitude,
> Scorn and despair.

Here is all the throb of a poetic agony but metre gives way to the rhythm of recurrent anguish.

Having proposed that poetry is something not made captive by formal divisions of literature Wordsworth proceeds to the point that the language of poetry need not differ—and ought *not* to differ—from the language of prose, or, more particularly, of everyday speech, and it is then that we come upon the dilemma of Wordsworthian criticism, his theory of poetic diction. Not that he believed in poetic diction in the same sense that Doctor Johnson had done—quite the reverse. Wordsworth wished the language of poetry to coincide with the natural language of men. "Such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation".

This sort of language was perhaps an apparent essential for Wordsworth because he portrayed simple, rustic life and his rustic characters, if they spoke at all, ought to speak in character. But where the poet himself speaks, surely the first essential of his language is that it gives expression to the *poet's* thoughts—it is he who must speak and the words are those which suggest themselves naturally to him in the stress of the moment—words which have the capacity to contain the full meaning of what he believes. And since a poet is not as other men his language cannot always be their language. We need only read Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* to realise how much two of the simplest words in the English language could mean to Milton. To say that readers cannot understand or cannot easily comprehend the meaning of a poet is no argument against him. Browning's famous remark about his "Sordello" illustrates the point. The great poet does not write alone for an audience but for himself. Even though he may be half conscious of an intended audience when he begins, his feeling overwhelms all thoughts save the one desire of self-expression, of expression adequate and intelligible primarily to himself. Pope was unable to forget his audience save on rare occasions, but the greater poet may always do so. That the reader may not afterwards understand is the reader's fault or misfortune. We only get out of poetry what we put into it and the rarer the poetry the more the reader must exert himself to realise its riches—must for the time being be one with the poet, acquire poetic faith.

There is an added difficulty in Milton and Shakespeare. Milton wrote poetry that was the fruit of vast knowledge: we too need to acquire specific portions of

that same knowledge to appreciate his genius fully. So with Shakespeare, we must become in part Elizabethans to receive the whole sum of his art. But this is a minor point. If Wordsworth had lived long enough he might have joined in depreciating the poetry of Browning as obscure and held up Keats as a model of clarity. Naturally these two were apart in their poetry. Keats is readily enjoyed by most because he gives utterance to matters which the average man, with very little exertion and a modicum of sensibility, may drink in—the beauty of autumn, the sorrow of frustrated love, the transitoriness of humanity. Browning's mind worked in altogether different fashion. The love he debates in "One Word More" was not far removed from the passion of Keats for Fanny Brawne, but he strives to find expression for it to satisfy himself and the result was a typical Browning poem, quite as intelligible as Keats's Sonnet—if only the reader can creep into the queer, vital mind of Browning and look out on Elizabeth Barratt and Italy and Dante with Browning's eyes and something of Browning's experience.

Perhaps Wordsworth was aware of all this or would have acquiesced in it had it been suggested to him. What was it, again, that he wished to replace by his "natural" language? He was defaming, not Browning's turbidity but the old "gaudy verse" of the eighteenth century. He remarks in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, "Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness". The language of poetry had fast been approaching the deadlock of a conventional symbolism. Pope and his imitators absolutely refused to call a spade a spade, or even a shovel. Eupheuism was considered the first essential of success in poetry. A pair of scissors became in Pope's hands a twin engine, a babbling brook became an insipid purling stream. To say that such were part of the tradition of epic, or rather of mock-heroic poetry does not clear the Augustans of the charge of artificiality—the practice was applied indiscriminately in all forms of verse from pastoral to elegiac. This language Wordsworth wished to supplant and root out, to substitute for it a purer idiom that could reveal only the truth. But he could not have wished—and probably did not dream he had implied a wish—to make the language of poetry "as easy as pie" He himself must have found from experience that in the greatest moments of his poetry he could not talk or write like an average man. But he could call white white and black black.

For Wordsworth to advocate a prose choice of words was also superfluous. The words of poetry are never markedly at variance with those of prose except by virtue of individual idiosyncrasies in the writers, irrespective of the form employed. The prose *order* of words was much more significant for Wordsworth's purpose than the prose *choice* of words and this was a principle applicable to any poetry which was to be intelligible. Poetry is necessarily latent in all words, both by association and inherently, because words are the vocalised expression of ideas, and the words of greatest poetic value are, as Wordsworth justly points out, the words most commonly used. But they need not be, as he seems to claim, the words of simple people. These are included but are only a part of the selection of words which might be graded as comparatively more poetical in content than others. The language of pure passion, it may be further noticed, is naturally simple and direct, even discounting the sympathy of the reader.

It has been said often enough that Wordsworth succeeds most in his own poetry where he disregards his own rules but the critics who say this have not always sufficiently considered what rules Wordsworth really intended to lay down. Their mistakes are due partly to a misinterpretation of his attempts to formulate

his conceptions and partly to his own comparative failure to express clearly his ideas. It was not that he lacked critical ability but that he had as yet no sufficient body of criticism on which to draw. Despite the great advances made by Dryden and Johnson the abstract principles of poetry had scarcely received adequate treatment since the day of Sidney's "Apologie". The great critics of the nineteenth century, the critics moreover, of the Romantic school, had not yet risen to their full glory and Wordsworth could sound but a brief flourish to prelude their coming. He was hampered in some measure by having an axe to grind. But in the light of later and more expert criticism and with the help of his biography and poetry it is possible to discover something of the force which was latent in his mind and to realise the debt which English poetry and the appreciation of it owes, albeit indirectly, to his resounding influence.

ANEURIN RHYS.

The Lark

I AM the sun's emissary,
Over whose monastic tower,
No doves of homage hover;
No rose of reverence grows.
Hence I go, ferried by devotion,
Under green rafters, or the eaves
Of strawberry leaves,
And eavesdrop in the wainscot of the world;
By trefoil bastioned; by sage and hellebore:
Where roots and sap connive and talk,
And the air of rustic lovers,
Goes sinewed with the plough's melodious walk.
Oh happy I!
On nest of threaded summers thus to lie;
Drinking the dew of nymphs and shepherds tales;
Stroking the faun-like legends as they fly:
While floating deep within my heart's quiet skies,
Yet lonely as a bucket in a well,
My starveling peer awaits,
And clangs his need impatient on my breast.
His burnished boredom shared alone with Time,
(That deafest mute who only stares and stares);
Hindered by light from visualising light;
While hells of ignorance go eagling through his brain.
Oh happy, happy I!
In nest of goodly service thus to lie,
And know my lord's athirst for my warm word:
Sweet gossip for his unenlightened ear.—
I sleep, while night
Allows my dreams to steal her notes,
To twine moon music in my daily chimes.
Then morning tugs the bell rope of my throat,
Tossing me skywards, with rhapsodies heavy on my wing,
And all my soul lichened with loveliness,
I give my lord his revenue—I sing.

Margaret Howard.

From The Prelude: Decline

Of the English Soldier: On Italian Autumn

IF Italy, from autumn, has laid waste
Her former glories and historic powers,
And all her carven palaces and towers
Are, with war's twilight, finally effaced;
Then what proud empire ever may inspire
Again such beauties, what great faith excite
Such regal visions, or what spirit light
Man's fading grandeur with ecstatic fire?

For now not only Italy decays,
But Man's great soul with autumn, too, declines,
And all its fabric with out-moded creeds
Is so diseased that, though compassion stays
Alive in him, what impulse may combine
To Truth his fragments or to Love his deeds?

Of the English Soldier: On the Anguish of War in Spring

WHAT blood has flowed in war on these red blooms,
What skies been splintered in these hyacinth cones,
And through this cherry's flowering what white bones
Have felt the flesh's terror for its wounds?
What thorns of pain have barbed this tender rose,
And what swift anguish veined this waking leaf,
And in this season what astounding grief
Has stirred the earth from winter's cold repose?

But when clear Spring, that this war's cloud conceals,
Returns with Peace to cloak the waiting hills
With former glories and impending spells,
Then in the valleys of our mortal souls,
Oh what bright flower and what immortal leaf
Shall fill the verdure of our slopes with love?

R.A.M.C., C.M.F. *R. H. Bowden.*

Too Soon

TOO soon proud Autumn's glory passes
And crumbles, leaf by leaf, to dust!
Too soon fade golden woodland masses;
And dewy cobwebs on the grasses
Are banished by frost's silver rust.

Too soon appear the sullen edges
Of dark clouds sagging with the rain!
Too soon winds whip stiff-withered sedges;
And heavy snow half-buries hedges
Beside each buried country lane.

Newport, Mon. *Lawrence W. Hockey.*

Per Ardua—

ONLY to know your heart is light,
Only to touch your hand once more,
Only these, no new delight
I hunger for.

Such little things and yet so much
Beyond the reach of hope as though
The sundered poles should meet and touch
And flowers grow

Where their two snows take fire and melt
In warmth new-born of mingled cold
And on your fresh, young lip be spelt
Love ages old.

Spare me no pang if I may hope,
No gulf of grief whence I may climb.
No fog of doubt if I may grope
To you in time.

I do not ask but seek to give,
Yet this is not my whole desire,
I may draw breath but cannot live
Without your fire

Which burns contentment like a dross
To leave my heart impenitent,
Rich with the plenitude of loss
Your going meant.

* * *

Ah! Hope, mine enemy, whose tongue
So falsely whispered of desire,
I slay you now, your dirge unsung,
Your grave the mire.

Rise not again; to me deny
Eternally my lost delight
Though memories should multiply
And eyes grow bright

With tears embayed within my mind,
Whose lightless mirror holds her there—
A shadow shape of pain divined
In black despair.

—ad Cœlum

Now give me more than mortal strength
To curb a heart that over-leaps;
She smiled and spoke and time lost length
And space its deeps.

And life became a pin-point sharp
With ecstasy that holds a tear;
My pulses beat upon a harp
Within my ear.

I have no care, I am released—
A star flung far and fast and wide—
To burn for ever, unappeased,
Where suns have died.

* * *

And I am blest beyond desert of man,
The mock of fools for I have mounted Heaven
Whence envious gods may cast me down again
To Tophet even;

But let me in your phoenix-fire be shriven
And wear the pinions of a Gabriel
To whom within your trembling arms is given
A citadel.

Oh! make your snowy breast a flaming pyre;
If I must burn in passion or despair
Turn me to ash with unconsumed desire,
Ash, light as air.

Zero.

[This poem was referred to in the Love Lyric Competition award, p. 246, and would have been awarded first place if its length had not disqualified it.]

The Visionary

HE has a mind
As deep in knowledge as the breath of Spring,
And yet as pure as water running clear
From rocky source among the Alpine hills,
A mind receptive to the beauties of this life
And still a mind that seeks beyond for God.

'Tis all I know of him, but that his eyes
Shine true, as I believe his thoughts are true,
And yet, as clouds transparent cross the sky
On starlit nights, and thoughtful stars shine through,
Though not so brightly clear yet quite as clear . . .
So shine his eyes when deep in thought they gaze
Across the room and see it not, for he
Is far away; and where we cannot know:—
Then, as the wind unveils the pensive stars
So some slight movement blows his thoughts away
And he awakes from dreams; 'tis then I know
That thought can hold us in its sacred sway
And draw us, like that dreamer, close to God.

Arbroath. *Elisabeth A. Swapp.*

Travel

NOW spring dissolves the curtains of the mind
And worlds untrodden crowd upon the eye,
And wonder rises, warm, amazedly,
And splendour in the blood, too long confined,
Goes forth intemperate of song.

I shall enlarge all sensuous supply,
Be bold in my believing, swift to unbind
The cords of tarnished thought, nor wind
About the heart repentant memory.
O life, but I have slept too long!

Too long, while fields of yet unravished gold
Lay wanton as a girl for gathering,
While heart and liberal thought, with chastened wing
Stood lackey to expedience. Unfold,
My heart, for life has need of you.

Has need, for while the new-born moments sing
And very nations of the globe are rolled
Pursuing day, beneath the eye, the old
Desire wakens to the song of spring,
And I the priest with all endeavour due
Wed love to virgin life anew.

Over the Pacific—1.2.46. *Christmas Humphreys.*

Requiem for Doreen

BIRD upon the naked bough
Sadly sing your requiem now,
While the sun sequestered lies
In high banks of ebony;
And the tears of bush and tree
Fall in solemn sympathy.

When Spring came, oh, she was fair;
How the sun danced in her hair;
How did rose and lily seek
For predominance in her cheek;
No gay bud from which bee sips
Glowed more richly than her lips;
Speedwells tucked within her eyes
Seemed twin circles cut from skies . . .
Oh! she was the fairest thing
When the world embraced the Spring.

Summer loved her, only see
How they romped in ripe barley;
Sorrel, poppy, marguerite
Wove a carpet for her feet;
And that marigold, the sun,

Beamed benignly on the fun;
While the murmurs of the rill
Mingle with her laughter still . . .
Oh! she was a merry fay
When Summer with the world did play.

Autumn came with thong and whip;
Held the world in deadly grip;
Chased off butterfly and bee;
Drove songbirds across the sea;
Tattered Summer's brilliant dress;
Slashed down flowers and slashed down flesh . . .

Nude woods shed the melody
Of the wildbirds threnody;
Weep you every bush and tree;
Weep in solemn sympathy!

Bird upon that naked bough
Slowly chant your requiem . . . now . . .

Amersham. *Kay Toovey.*

Not of My Own Choosing

I COME—
Not of my own choosing, or thine, do I come;
This meeting, this foregathering, was pre-ordained
So that you and I should be together.
In the backward mists of Time
There was a moment when the earth was still,
And languorous, weighted with its pregnant womb,
And in the lull a nation's spirit fell,
Tormented, prone before the feet of wisdom.
Barbaric odes, a shattered culture,
These forswore the voice of dearest care,
And frigid in her sober dress of barren legacy,
The empty mistress of philosophy
Recanted truths, discarded love.
Her charity became a sin that wound around the heart,
Emasculating liberty.
A song arose—
A paean rang throughout the earth,
Whose womb had yielded fruit.
The son of love was come to set the spirit free,
And in that coming bore the seed of life.
The earth is ours; we are its heirs,
You and I, who seek maturity,
And come together in the bliss
Of perfect love.

Arbroath. *James Crawford Milne.*

For a German Mother in Germany, 1946

IN the desolate city
Were all that is transient and lovely
Is sunk to profundity:
Where despair folds upon grief
And grief upon despair;
Is it not enough
To be dying quietly?
Or, can the tortured body
Upon those two dark wings rise clear
To soul's high clarity
And there find songs?

Oh you who will to be singing
Through your deep suffering
You give to us all a pledge
Here in our aridity;
And once more the sparkle of beauty
Breaks round profundity's edge.

And surely you will see again
Here and hereafter
Your lilting garden tulips
Hear their many-coloured laughter;
And surely for you will sway again
Across sky's rafter
Spring's full golden blossoms,
Here and hereafter.

Ivery Bartholomew.

From Bloemfontein

IN the green lands
After the rain
there's a kind, wet stillness.
The natives bend
quietly over their picking,
And the rows of green
are comfortable,
Stretched out long
and green and content
And only a little awake.
The far pines, close together,
darkly green and grey,
have not their dumb acceptance;
They are living,
very vital, but still.
Behind them, many many prickly lights
Shoot and sparkle golden
Against the dim houses.
An unseen noiseless river
Is in the valley,
which the pines know.
The road is red and wet,
The white pebbles
and sticks and high wild grass
are wet, and might be gay
if their silence were broken.
All the simplicity
Might be flashed into life
By an unintending man or a beast,
But nothing breaks
the living calm
Of the grey mist on all the green
On the brown red.

Annette Maxwell.

The Vale of Avalon

THERE is a vale in Avalon more green
Than grasses glistening after April rain.
Beryl and emerald stain the jewelled earth
With verdant exudations. Golden grain,
Sinuous, willowy, with burdened grace,
Bends to the measured langour of the breeze,
Its wind-swept music sighing on the air
In soft and undulating harmonies.
Maternal Earth, benevolent and full,
Rears her lush grasses, lithe as gleaming glaives,
And through th' astonished shadows of the trees
The moted sunbeams tapestry the graves.

(Here Winter's wanton and improvident sun,
The last inheritance of Autumn's age,
Squanders his golden coffers, well-nigh spent,
On Earth's decrepitude: a wistful page
In pallid parody, as though he saw
The ivied, crow-stepped cotes; the dark arcades
Of beechen majesty; the tree-girt fanes,
Enshrined by bracken-fringed and vinewed glades;
The sweet, rook-haunted avenues, where fell
In plenitude the year's decanted leaves;
The candled chestnuts and the moss-gowned meads;
The mintage of the Autumn's golden sheaves).

'Tis here, each afternoon, the warm sun comes,
And lies upon the lake, and turns to gold
The breathless waters; and arcadian rest
Enwraps the steepled hamlet and the fold.
Beneath the antlered elm the wattled hen,
Beside the gleaming cote the chirring dove,
The dew-lapped Jerseys scythe the sapid grass,
The temulent pollen-bearers slowly move
In palpitant uncertainty. Across
The mazy mead the crooling lambs now make
Their frolic carnival, and o'er the bright
And langoured bosom of the breathing lake
Is borne, in immelodious lament,
The corncrake's croon, the frog's deep-throated croak.
Nature is busy at her chores, for soon
Her evening guest will don her sable cloak.

The air is sweet with musk; and Evening comes,
Tripping upon the crimson skirts of Day.
Bodkined with comet fire, her hair is bright
With the argent osprey of the Milky Way.
The beacon moon, the confidant of stars,
Night's paramour, now spreads his silken breeze

Upon her astral couch, and lights the broad
And living mirror of the silvered seas.

How softly fall the curtains of the Eve
In Avalon, when day is at its close!
The tender-eyed and mellow-throated Eve,
Star-sequined, sapphire-crowned. The queenly rose,
The sweet, capricious mistress of the weald,
Assumes her peasant cloak of sombre grey,
When Evening, like a sleep long overdue,
Falls, measureless, upon the eyes of Day.
But, soft! the vale is tremulous with joy,
For Night has hung her lanterns in the sky,
Now azure-canopied. Tempean peace
Inhabits Avalon, without a sigh.
The earth lies still and hushed, with riches full,
Expectantly, before the harvest hour,
Like a sweet woman waiting to be loved,
Impatient in her golden-mantled bower.
The solemn-eyed and ululating owl,
Thalian prodigy! deserts the lime,
And blinks incredulously on his world,
Fashioned in silhouette. The dismal time
When gremlins fly and hounds do bay the moon,
Searches across the mush-enchanted skies,
As though the importuning dawn did best
Its sequent wings against Night's pensive eyes.

It is the Dawn, the first warm blush of Day,
Night's curfew, daylight's harbinger, the bell
Of life's renewal, the muezzin of morn,
The daubster on sky canvases, whose spell
Of lightly-wetted brushes spends itself
In damaskeen cloud-frescoes, gossamer-wrought,
Amorphous arabesques and brief mosaics,
And fragile tapestries, irised, wind-caught.
Fantastic draperies, spun of silken shade,
Finger the dazzled hills, like slender falls,
And all the value is bathed in vermeil fire,
Where Night, unswathed, has dropt her vap'rous shawls.

Day's heralds, in their pale-gold livery,
Are stepping down the carriage-ways of Dawn,
To meet th' arriving chariot of the sun,
And languid Twilight, curtsying on the lawn,
Is hurried from the door. With busy breath
The servitors make clamour through the mesne,
The woods awake to oaken minstrelsy,
The noisy farmyard calls to meadows green.

The lithe-limbed doe moves stealthily across
The scented pastures; and the sun-kissed air
Is stirring with the wings of colibris,
The saffron-coated fox now quits his lair,
Th' indifferent garrons stoically watch
The pinguid ruminants on the dappled lea,
And blushing apple-orchards glow, and spread
Their sinuous arms in leafy filigree.
By thatch and kerf and beaded tussock hid,
In vine and myrtle and in bearded awn,
With bountiful benevolence Chloris guards
The green and lovely vale of Avalon.

Edinburgh 3. *Thomas Morgan McGurk.*

The Isles of Scilly

THE gray rocks shoulder off the sea
That falls in white about their sides,
And hunch themselves to meet the tides;
Mumbling of times that used to be
They shamble on with ponderous strides.

Out in the West they gather round,
Survivors of old ship-wrecked lands,
These wizened rocks, these sun-bright sands,
Now in shoal water run aground
But mindful still of Southern strands.

Here where the Northern blood runs slow
The green-patched jackets that they wear
Give them an air of devil-may-care,
And while the land's asleep in snow
With flowers they deck their hoary hair.

Aylesbury. *John Buxton.*

Skokholm

(Island off the coast of Pembrokeshire)

COME, thrust your feet in drenching dew
On Skokholm's island-early grass
As wheatears bob, rock pipits flit
From gold-green lichened walls you pass.
Gulls voice your coming, swoop and swerve,
And rabbits scuttle through the maze
Of elfin paths, pink tufts of thrift,
To vanish: only puffins gaze
With fixed mock-solemn eye and bow;
Absurdly pompous, clownish birds!
From Mad Bay ranks of guillemots
Send up a groan of rumbled words:
And there's no ending to the sea.

Close by these rocks on halcyon days
Atlantic seals swim leisurely
Or, hugely graceful, roll and laze.
Sink down on wind-sprung heather now;
Be fused with sun and blue, blue sky:
Then yours the long gull's gleaming poise;
Your flight that cruising gannet's, high
Above all else save heaven's wind.
But you'll not know my island's heart
Until you've seen her wear a storm
And felt her tear the winds apart
And brace to meet full headlong seas,
Aye, hurl them back a seething rage
A frenzied boiling-pot of foam:
Spray hurtling up—a threatened cage
That falls, falls dashed to nothingness.
And Oh! you'll not divine her peace
Until you've known her sleeping there,
An infant swathed in misty fleece
For wind and wave against all time.
Such peace is of the soul. I know,
Death find me where he will, I'll taste
My salty lips and smile to go—
Where there's no end to windy skies
And there's no ending to the sea.

Badminton, Glos. *Francis Stephenson.*

The Victoria Falls

SO hushed, so hot, the broad Zambesi lies
Above the Falls, and on her weedy isles
Swing antic monkeys, swarm malignant flies,
And seeming-lazy lurk long crocodiles.
But somewhere down the river does the hush
Become a sibilance that hints a sigh,
A murmur, mounting as the currents rush
Faster, and while the murmur is a cry,
The cry becomes a shout, the shout a thunder
Until the whole Zambesi waters pour
Into the earth's side, agitating under
Infinite spray mists, pounding the world's floor.
Wrapped in this liquid turmoil, who can say
Which is the mighty echo, which the spray?

London, W.2. *Muriel Spark.*

Full Moon over the Acropolis

SHADOWS of broken pillars cut like scars
Athwart the bone-white stone, and where of old
Men worshipped wisdom fane and moon now hold

Their silver court subpoena'd by the stars;
As cloth of velvet round some holy vase
Night's moth-soft arms the Parthenon enfold,
Where kings acclaimed Athena throned in gold
Harsh grates the whispered word, each footfall jars.
The mind grows faint with wonder or despair,
Till one by one the pitying gods relent
And teach in death how men may circumvent
Depths too profound to plumb, burdens to bear:
Then on some plane where time and place are nought
May they find peace transcending human thought!

Athens, 26th February, 1945. *Eric Peters*

From "England", lines 4,562 to 4,591

South Devon

THAT lovely stretch, between the silver Dart
And Start's white tower above the Skerry Banks,
Was burnished when I saw it, like the seas
In Coleridge's ballad, painted waves,
Green by the shore and purple in the deeps.
Its curve, green-hooded by the Devon hills,
Rimmed by the yellow sands and broken, too,
By dim, white villages in coves and shelves;
Peace-splendid, happy hours of idleness,
When thought was all the labour in demand
And etched rock-gullies shone in summer suns,
Waiting the artist's eye to change their looks
And so transform their being into print
Or picture or deep-sounding symphonies.
One, at the border of a little wood,
Which overhung it, sheltering its brow
With rich abundance of young foliage,
Seemed solely wrapt in time's still, silent thought.
Below, to southward, tiny in the noon,
The nets hung web-like, drying by green boats
Ready for evening and the mackerel,
Shall such a copper sun e'er sink again
In splendour of dull purple and old rose,
Dropping behind a fleet of plough-smooth boats
Which thrust and plied in watery tapestries,
While darkened silhouettes drew in a wealth
Of silver fish from out the waveless sea?
Still as a picture of the ancient world
On Egypt's friezes round the walls of Thebes.
Here, on the woven tapestry of Time,
This scene is fixed forever.

Rugeley. *E. C. Toye.*

Poets and Pretenders

A FAITHFUL AXIOMATIC SURVEY OF NEW BOOKS

EXQUISITE is a word which makes a large claim and should be used sparingly, even in this age of superlative expressions for the mediocre. Indeed, so often are we confronted with the tedious that we are all too prone to mistake a glimmer for a sunrise, or, after heavy weather with the hardly-wrought puzzles of our Dylan Thomases, to succumb to the magic of plain language as to a spell. But making every allowance for the deceitfulness of comparative appearances, there comes a moment when even the hard-boiled may employ such words with justice, in judging a work of art; and being ourselves but reluctantly impressionable we are glad to use it of Victoria Sackville-West's new long poem, *The Garden* (Michael Joseph, 8s. 6d.). Here is once more the sort of poetry which is, by its very cast of thought, a rebuke to an age which runs a-whoring after its own inventions, whether these be verbal incoherence or its physical *reductio ad absurdum*, the atomic bomb; poetry wherein the tenderness has the strength of life itself and in which simplicity reveals that profundity which only the heart can plumb. This is the kind of poetry wherein one may observe a fine intellect harnessed and controlled, not by an itch for public fame but by a spirit intent only to penetrate yet another ell, or even an inch, deeper into the essential mysteries, and quite uncaring whether praise or blame should wait upon the effort. The poem might equally well have been called "The Gardener", for in reading it we practise his skills, dream his dreams and think his wide-ranging, pregnant thoughts even while we regard the never-ceasing growth and development of the garden itself; and this garden is in reality the whole of life.

In form the poem varies. Sometimes it is rhymed, sometimes not. At times the metre changes with a change of tone and direction. The garden has moods as well as seasons, but all are gentle because there is no conflict, but an acceptance of the laws of life within the framework of which, unrebellious, man may strive, design, improvise and be happy even in his disappointments.

> "Here we may dream of different beauty seen,
> Desired though not fulfilled, that final beauty
> Denied to all our scheming as we know
> Too well, yet still delude ourselves in vision
> Unreasonable, in pathetic faith
> As the advancing soul, abashed, disheartened,
> Loses itself in night to reach a day
> Resplendent after darkness,—so in Winter
> The gardener sees what he will never see."

But, as Miss West says elsewhere, "A poet's dream costs nothing; yet is real".

That belief in the reality of the spiritual, of the superior value of the common heritage of man over anything he may acquire or invent, is the permanent underlying conviction of every word in this poem; and therein lies its own worth to a distressful age. The minutiae of her garden are never too small to provide a microcosm of larger things and the loving clarity of observation is a never-failing spur to that sort of imaginative emphasis which makes things come alive in our minds.

> "The yellow crocus through the grass will bring
> Her light as pointed as a candle flame,
> Not there at sunrise, but at midday there.

And snowdrops that increase each year,
Each leaf so tipped with white
As though it too desired to bear a flower."

The poem begins with winter, rises through spring to summer and declines gently into autumn. There the mellow ripeness of Miss West's philosophy rounds off a memorable cycle. In conclusion we quote her last few lines, for they seem to us to enclose within them all the tender philosophical wisdom which has inspired the whole of a truly memorable achievement.

"November sun that latens with our age,
Filching the zest from our young pilgrimage,
Writing old wisdom on our virgin page.
Not the sharp-minted coinage of the Spring
When all was but a delicate delight
And all took wing and all the bells did ring;
Not the spare Winter, clothed in black and white,
Forcing us into fancy's eremite,
But gliding Time that slid us into gold
Richer and deeper as we grew more old
And saw some meaning in this dying day;
Travellers of the year, who faintly say
How could such beauty walk the common way?"

The late C. W. Brodribb, whose initials C.W.B. will be remembered by many people, has given us posthumously a collection of poems which expresses, in the variety and character of its contents, as just an appreciation of his own protean quality as one could wish. The poems are emotional, witty, learned, gay, heroical and tender, but all of them informed with the same dignity and finished with the same easy grace.

The scholarly attainment of a first-class mind did not really need to include those fifteen or so pages of Latin verse, some of it original and some translations into Latin, which occur at the end of the book, and yet this classical virtuosity of a bygone day was as much part of the man as anything else.

But what strikes one most in this collection is the quiet and urbane humour which informs many of his pieces. Here is a sample, "Autumn's Splendours", which combines, as all good humorous verse must, those necessary qualities of the tender and the risible in almost equal measure. The mistake which would-be writers of humorous verse make all too often is of trying to be too funny, or to be funny upon too exclusive a note. In fact, of course, humour thrives best in a sort of double harness with pathos or, as in this case, with a gentle recognition of life's irremediable disappointments, and this truth was an instinctive inspiration to the late poet.

"Don't miss the autumn's splendours,
In tube and train we're told;
Out walkers and week-enders,
Campaigners of both genders
To wood and weald and wold,
Where leaves are lavish spenders
And prodigal of gold!

But toes that toast on fenders
Are not to be cajoled;

Home keepers and hearth tenders
Will make no more surrenders
To wet and mud and cold;
Nor can dead leaves be menders
Of hopes that summer sold."

In other poems there is more than a reminiscence of Pope, with his unrivalled management of the rhyming couplet. On the subject of Mr. Churchill's 70th birthday, Mr. Brodribb can exclaim:

"Let Churchill take the milestone in his stride,
And treat a birthday as a foe defied."

But one should expect such brevity of wit, even while one delights in it, for that is the quality which emerges most distinctively in all these poems, even when there is no intention to be funny. The work is that of a crisp, strong mind, a little aloof, content with a half-anonymous fame, and obviously delighting more in the achievement than in any consequences of it.

The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt, a compendious volume of some 313 pages decorated with a portrait of the author (Macmillan, 12s. 6d.) is hailed as "the first comprehensive collection of the work of one of Canada's greatest living poets". Whether many people read the blurb on the dust cover we do not know, but we are reminded very often of the old tag that good wine needs no bush, and that, therefore, opinions expressed *ex parte*, as it were, in order to impress the new reader are psychologically a mistake. If the opinion be illfounded, the reader will be resentful, and if it be just he may even be disappointed, as one is by too glowing an anticipatory view. So in this case we took the book in hand with a preliminary feeling of discouragement, not by any means induced by the size of the volume but as a direct consequence of this somewhat equivocal recommendation. For what is "the greatest" Canadian poet? To what standard are we to refer this work?

For our part, we know of one standard only; that is, the mystical standard of true poetry, which unless a man reach it he has no right to be called a poet at all. In this case, look where we would, we found nothing but words, descriptive indeed and often conveying a picture sufficiently clearly to redeem and justify the time and effort expended in their assembly, but of poetry we were able to discover nothing. The work is mere prose, cut up into lines in varying lengths but quite often innocent even of the necessary rhythm which could excuse such arbitrary truncation. Let us take the first thirteen lines of what is described as "a magnificent epic"; this is called "The Titanic", and our excerpt is better not worse than the bulk of this particular poem, and compares with anything else in this collection:

"The hammers silent and the derricks still
And high-tide in the harbour! Mind and will
In open test with time and steel had run
The first lap of a schedule and had won.
Although a shell of what was yet to be
Before another year was over, she,
Poised for the launching signal, had surpassed
The dreams of builder or of navigator.
The Primate of the Lines, she had out-classed
That rival effort to eliminate her
Beyond the North Sea where the air shots played

The laggard rhythms of their fusilade
Upon the rivets of the *Imperator*."

There are many kinds of heresy against which we have set our faces, and one of the most persistent of these is the belief that, to be a poet, all you have to do is to write in verse form; but, just as fine feathers do not make fine birds, so does a mere metrical appearance fail to make prose into poetry, with whatever descriptive quality it be loaded. Let us then indulge our passion for the orthodox by dipping into *Home Again*, by Guy Schofield (Williams & Norgate, 3s. 6d.). This is a long-short poem of some twenty-one pages which deals with that all too common, and therefore all too disregarded, difficulty of the young returned soldier in readjustment to a life almost forgotten in six years of unsettlement and danger. It is a promising theme, and in the hands of the author it develops well indeed, with its atmosphere of frustrated nostalgia for the old simple delights which are there to be enjoyed but for which the taste has for the time being departed:

"His restless feet, amid the fret
Of shower-bright willow and moonset
That veils the garden, know no peace,
Yet touched with the first violet

Is all that turf-sweet air, with roses
Red to the thorn, anemones
Upon the bank where light reposes
Long after day has left the leas."

But the orthodox is not always by any means sufficiently justified by its orthodoxy. We believe that those, like Mr. Schofield, who have music in their souls, and that gentle perception of the finer subtleties of life which a poet needs, will inevitably seek to express themselves in the traditional way, for the music in them demands those rhythms and cadences for its expression; and subtleties can only be conveyed by the extreme niceties and restraints of language. But, alas, there are those whom mere proficiency in versification also leads along these orthodox paths, and we are afraid that Stowers Johnson, in *London Saga* (Fortune Press, 9s. 6d.), has been misled, for some 422 lines, by the belief that traditional versification would, if indulged in, somehow result in poetry by the sheer force of sustained effort and verbal skill. We must disabuse him. His rhymed pentameter couplets are well enough, although not by any means perfect, but in the ardour of description and in the necessity for tight rhyming, not entirely met, he has forgotten completely the need for subjective writing, for that identification of his deepest self with his theme, which alone could have redeemed so much effort from mediocrity.

Very similar, if somewhat more distinguished, is *Alexander of Macedon*, by Viscount Mersey (Murray, 5s.)—a metrical account of Alexander, decently written, without too great a display of erudition, and informed with a simplicity which, in spite of a general absence of poetic quality and at times even of a sufficient metrical skill, manages to attract. The trouble with this, as with the last book, is that the effort of versification has absorbed too much of the author's powers, as witness the more than occasional flatnesses which mar the performance and the rhyme-words which inflict their jolts upon the reader. Speaking of Alexander, he says this in one place:

"The wound was slight; some bones were bruised and bent;

He healed himself just by remaining quiet
During six days and nights within his tent
And keeping to a very simple diet."

This is not an unfair quotation. It would be possible to find even less poetic ones.

A book of collected poems, when it is full of worthwhile things deserving such resurrection, is to be welcomed, if only for its handiness. *Collected Poems*, by William Kean Seymour (Hale, 8s. 6d.) is such a compilation, and it is refreshing to find that while the blurb considers these poems show no slavish acceptance of tradition they yet exhibit a sound loyalty to the past. We will not quarrel with the publisher's announcement, or seek to inquire at what point slavish acceptance becomes sound loyalty, for sound Mr. Kean Seymour certainly is, and musically sound at that. The volume contains some 250 largeish pages, and as a sample of good English poetry it might be in the possession of anybody with complete propriety. There is a strong lyrical note, at once brave and tender, running through most of it, and to those who believe that poetry should sing the book will give abiding pleasure. Mr. Seymour does what all such poets do—he helps himself from nature in every mood and in every manifestation for the illustrations and analogies which he needs for the deeper undercurrent of his emotion. And yet he is never merely descriptive, cataloguing beauties in a painstaking attempt to make a picture. Such pictures as form in the mind in reading his poems are evoked not described and are the result of an impact upon something deeper within us and infinitely more significant than the intellect.

To select from so vast a collection that short poem the quality of which shall do justice to the whole and which shall convey the correct nuance, the delicate flavour, of this poet's work, is a hit or miss business, in which chance must play the major part. But let us quote not the haunting "Cæsar Remembers" but this short song, for we think it, in its simplicity, its lyrical swing, and its delicacy, a truly typical thing:

"Summer is blue and golden, summer
Has jocund days,
Is green with flower-strewn footsteps
In all her ways;
She shall delight you with song and blossom,
She has my praise.

But, in the dark of winter, sudden
As light you came;
You brought the gold of summer,
Her flowers and flame,
Therefore I sing of summer, and singing
I sing your name."

This bi-monthly batch brings us two volumes, both from the Fortune Press, for which Howard Sergeant is responsible—the first, *The Leavening Air* (5s.), and the second an anthology entitled *For Those Who are Alive* (6s.). Let us deal first with the personal creation, as being the more important. We may say at once that here is neither slavish adherence to classical forms nor sound loyalty to them, indeed there is a loyalty to heresy only too pronounced in the rhythmless prosiness of all too many of the poems which are here given. We are not impressed

even by the fact that most of them have already appeared in magazines and periodicals, including that in which this review appears. Mr. Sergeant appears not to believe that poetry should sing, and seems therefore never to encourage within himself that mood of muted melody upon which words can fly as though winged, preferring rather to cudgel his brains in a dry, matter-of-fact and studied manner to convey the mere thought of his mind. He can occasionally produce what can be called poetic language:

"And I recall that unconquerable land
where morning tiptoes the foothills,"

but so far as we can see the claim to poetry begins and ends with such, or similar, things. On the other hand, there is much wherein not even such imagery is to be found. Here is a sample of the sort of thing which to-day calls itself poetry, presumably in the belief that to-day's heresy will be to-morrow's faith:

"Wiser, no doubt, to think of war in terms
of shaded maps, observing with what ease
the black and strictly impersonal line ploughs
deeply, reaping a harvest of towns—the names,"

And yet this work has certain qualities of vigour and verbal distinction which should be noted. It is a pity that Mr. Howard Sergeant does not appear to realise that poetry is not a thing which can be composed only with thought and words, ink and paper, but that those four elements are merely the builder's materials for the expression of the creative genius of the architect.

Let us see how far Mr. Sergeant agrees with us by observing what sort of poems he has included in his anthology, and may therefore be presumed to prefer. He tells us in his prefatory note that the Anthology is selected from the works of "a heterogenous company of individuals, whose only common characteristic is a rejection of the standards upheld by modern society"; and that his purpose in making the collection "is to provide examples of recent trends in the work of the younger poets". If most of his examples were really typical of the trends in the work of our younger poets then indeed is the outlook for poetry grim; but fortunately the experience of this journal points to the fact that such examples, while unfortunately plentiful, are by no means typical of the whole current output, but that poetry worthy of the great tradition of our language is still being written, read, and—most important of all—understood. Indeed, this Anthology contains some.

Were we asked to describe the most common characteristic of these young poets, we should say that it is one against which we have often raised our banners and will continue to do so while there is strength left in us—the characteristic of obscurantism, the cult of incomprehension or of mere pungency of expression. Allied to this is the characteristic which we can only call ugliness. Beauty is out of fashion with the moderns; but we believe that beauty of expression and a musical cadence of sound are as much a part of true poetry as are the very words which clothe it. Just as you cannot have poetry without words so you cannot have it without rhythm and music; and those who have not this music in their souls should cease to call themselves poets, which they are not and obviously never will be.

Welcome exceptions there are indeed in this collection; Mr. Sergeant has included, and hardly in spite of himself, poems from one or two of those writers who, though they are both young and modern, still feel the necessity to bind their poetic impulse with the cords of discipline, thus giving it shape and outline. The most notable of these exceptions are Jean Kenward, Wilfred H. Bartlett,

and Arnold Vincent Bowen, who are represented by poems which, by very reason of their willing acceptance of this discipline of outline and the paramount necessity of conveying meaning, succeed in capturing that music which is so essential.

But it is only fair that our quotations should be typical of the majority. Restricting ourselves to the intelligible, let us illustrate this unpoetic poetry with one stanza from Patricia Ledward's "Girls at Work":

"Around long tables in a noisy hut
They sort machinery; electric light
Burns all the day, the sunshine cuts
Into the red brick of a wall outside."

There is a further point on which we find ourselves at variance with the editor's diagnosis of the common characteristic of his authors. Their "rejection of the standards upheld by modern society" is, of course, no more than a rejection of poetical standards, which it is so necessary, in this ugly mechanistic age, to retain—the standards of simplicity, beauty and form. The standards of "modern society" which ought to be rejected are the very ones which these poets in fact uphold; the false standards which are the germ of the disease in the delirium of which mankind is at present tossing. It is described by a variety of names—materialism, the scientific outlook, nihilism, and one of its symptoms is the acknowledgment of "reality" only in those bare facts of the physical world which the patient can distinguish with his five senses, ignoring the spiritual or emotional elements which alone give complete reality to any experience. We quote from "Let the Chariot Be Still", by Richard B. Wright:

"Let us pose no more,
Let us to true things
Give true names.

Let us walk the shore
Where sands are firm
And where we know

The rocks are not too high
For plodding feet
And striving hearts;

And when we see the sky
Let us understand
Heaven is beneath it

Not above, for over it
Is but another sky
Another dream."

Small wonder that from this false and sterile spiritual standpoint comes such a cry of defeatism and despair as "Morning", by Sydney D. Tremayne:

"Morning, as cool and clear as violins;
The moon, fixed as a memory, shares the sky.
And O I am sick of heroics and statesmen's dawns
And the apparatus that tells us how to die.

What words, what oily speech, what pulpit sighs
Can mend the jagged homelessness we hide

Secret behind the shutter of our eyes
Where even thought is punished to intrude?"

So much for the unorthodox. We cannot regard such things as poetry in any classical sense of the word, or indeed in any accepted sense. It cannot be too often stated that poetry, besides being a thing of emotional expression, must also have a particular and peculiar form and technique, just as a human being has soul and body, and that body of an accepted form and contour. It is significant that when the poet forsakes the form he usually omits the soul, and that formless work almost inevitably has no emotional content, as though that quality refuses to be enshrined in words unless they be ordered in firm cadences of rhythm. But what are we to say of *Military Honours*, by J. A. Thompson (Fortune Press, 6s.), for this book refuses to fall neatly into either the formless unemotional group or into the classical emotional category. Emotion there is in these poems, but these are more those emotions aroused objectively by things external and not those quieter, more penetrating, subjective impulses from which true poetry springs. There is an immediacy about Col. Thompson's reactions which, perhaps, one might expect from wartime poems by a soldier. They are poems, as it were, by a man of action, not altogether forgetting to dream, but writing mostly from an impulsive reaction to outside stimuli.

The result is interesting often and even impressive sometimes by reason of the quality of its diction. But there is too much cleverness for much poetry, and we are left after perusal with a feeling that although we know the author much better than when we started, we have not been enriched but only intrigued. Even in his nostalgic moods, he is too eloquent, destroying with his virtuosity the simple artlessness of elemental feeling. Here is a stanza from a poem entitled "For Lucasta on Return", which illustrates this unhidden deliberation of composition, whereby it is almost impossible for anything to seem to come as a spontaneous outpouring, an unrehearsed utterance of the heart:

"How early will they falter at the changed laughter?
Trace a new muscle
when their fingers caress our mouths,
an easy strain, a cynic fixity.
Faces reflected in frost stippled eyes
seek the flair in the glazed mirror,
for the audience of the mind is weary
of the ulcer in the tongue.
Slender and passionate by the cold river,
when will the theft lie bare
to the prisoners of our hearts?"

What excellent fun there is in *A Cure For Cant*, by Moore Pim (McQueen, 1s.). This is a satire inspired by the atomic bomb and the age which, whatever its professions to the contrary, contemplates its use. The country which possesses the secret is, indeed, as these lines are being written, about to demonstrate to a delightfully shuddering world the cataclysmic force which their jealously guarded secret weapon can release. Mr. Pim remains pleasantly satirical and sardonic in his account of this human absurdity, and produces, from under his hat so to speak, a surprising anodyne for it in the power to resurrect the dead. This power is achieved somehow, we are not bored with the details, by researchers recruited from countries denied the atomic bomb secret, and the new weapon, being applied to America, rapidly reduces that country to a state of complete confusion, in the dispossession of heirs of property and the ejection of those who

succeeded to place and position by the death of previous incumbents.

It is all excellent in its satirical analysis of our modern stupidity, and we suppose that the verse form (very free) was necessary for this sort of thing. Having enjoyed it, we feel somewhat ungracious, therefore, in saying that it cannot be regarded as poetry.

A Resurgam Book, *Flowing Water*, by Patric Stevenson (4s. 6d.), contains poems said to be distinguished by many qualities which we are accustomed to insist must be present in poetic work. The assertion is by the publisher, and we leave it there, since in our view the claim is not justified. Mr. Stevenson has indeed many faults which it is to be hoped, and perhaps expected, time will cure, especially his rather irritating handling of rhyme and a somewhat unmusical attitude towards his work. There is also too great a preoccupation with sex, and sometimes it appears to be rather dragged in, having no particular pertinence to the matter in hand. This is done too often for reasons entirely unconnected with any personal preoccupation of the author with sex, but rather in the manner of an "enfant terrible" demonstrating a freedom from what has come to be called an inhibition. Let us quote a Petrarchan sonnet, both as a test of the author's technical skill, since this is a difficult form, and as an illustration of what we think are his prevailing faults. There are better things in this book, although none of them seem to us to come simply and musically from the heart with that unpretending lyricism which is the natural voice of the spirit, but our role is that of critic, to point out faults, and to this role we adhere.

"O the brown feet of spring are on the world,
His fuzzy, fair head in the sky,
Look where the cloud-skirt carries high
Vignette of rainbow, mother-of-pearled.
And everywhere the springs of spring are curled,
Wound up, pregnant, potent, standing by;
Fecund the seed in womb and thigh,
All things in tension, fair to be unfurled.

Come warmth, come switch, come key, come to unlock,
Loose these strained, pent-up forces out of cage;
Pass, time, until at zero hour the clock
Rings in spring's libidinous heritage
And leaf, lark, lamb (forest, field, flock),
Release in seasonable concubinage."

We are afraid that neither the technical difficulty, nor that greater emotional one, have been mastered in this attempt.

Another Resurgam book is entitled simply *Poems*, by Leslie Norris (3s. 6d.), a first published selection of poems by one who, in common with Patric Stevenson, can claim a period of service in the R.A.F. It would almost appear that the atmosphere of this, the youngest branch of the fighting services, is peculiarly sympathetic to the development of the poetic muse, for it seems to us that we have seen more attempts at poetry-writing from this source than from either of the other two services; but it may merely be that those who served therein are quicker to note the fact on the dustcovers of their books. However, there is no Air Force atmosphere about these poems, and here also Mr. Norris's affiliation with Patric Stevenson ends.

The poems in this book are, naturally enough, uneven in quality, but most of

them contain a certain element, we might almost say of mysticism, certainly of mystery, which lifts the writer above the level of the "Pretenders" with whom we have from time to time to deal. They are intensely subjective, and it is perhaps this quality which prevents even the least of them from degenerating into a mere prosaic statement of the obvious. If a poet really succeeds in mingling with his outward observation those innermost spiritual depths which lie at the very lowest level of his consciousness, his work in spite of some technical imperfections in the craft of expression, is redeemed from the danger of becoming superficial or hackneyed; because, even if he succeeds only in saying what has been said before—and most truths have been expressed many times—he will bring to the saying of it that individuality of interpretation—dare we call it soul?—which makes him unique among millions. This Mr. Norris has succeeded in doing, and it follows that even in the freest of his free verse he is never crude or unmusical. At their best these poems have an authentic passion which raises them to a high level.

We have selected for quotation the first two stanzas of "May Day", which reveal a certain quality of terseness which runs like a thread through the whole book.

"The wind rises the morning on its spires
Of white silk. The day has young and tender hours.
The sheep are only sleepily awake.
The squirrels in their discovered nest are a week
Old, and squeaking in celebration.
Across the sea a whole nation
Turns uneasily in untidy beds.
The wind, like leaves, shakes grave financiers' heads.
To them it brings a message or a warning,
To me the May morning.

And like a conjuring trick here comes the sun
Beneficently smiling on the young corn,
The great sun—the magnificently reborn
Emperor, the prince of immortal light,
I could say were this an epic poem,
But for this my neat, small home
Is far too simple.
The wind draws a ripple
Of fisted fern over the brook's water.
A farmer sings as he brings the morning milk.
The wind rises the morning on its delicate silk."

The difficulty of writing a philosophical treatise in poetic form, whether in blank verse or in any other prosodic shape, is apparent, and though many have tried it few have succeeded and none, we think, without long periods of mere eloquence to which it might be thought unkind to apply the epithet "prose", but which nevertheless it is, although it can be prose of very superfine quality; so, in reading *Dawn Mist*, by Eric Horsfall (Wellington Press, 5s.), we were scarcely surprised to find that though he fares better than most he is still subject to the inherent difficulty of his project. It cannot be too often emphasised in these notes that we are concerned only with poetry, and therefore, while we may praise Mr. Horsfall's eloquent and elegant diction, drawing attention to the lack of pretension and to the authentic note which he strikes throughout, these

things do not entirely suffice. However, there are passages, and not infrequent ones, where the author's sincerity raises him above the level of eloquence, as witness the following passage, which is typical of many others:

"The writing on the pool became obscure,
Then vanished, and the clear reflections of
The snow-white flowers and golden chandeliers
Appeared once more. I thought this was the end,
But suddenly the water was disturbed
Again, the lustrous images broke up,
And a new message floated into view,
This time of golden letters ringed with white—"

Argument in the main, however, must always forbid poetry, which is something that cannot issue from contention or from mental stress, and it is significant that in such things as this those passages in which poetry really gleams are digressional, illustrative and secondary to the main stream.

At this moment we might extend a welcome to two small new anthologies, one compiled by W. G. Bebbington called *Poems for Everyone* (Dent, 1s. 9d.), which is mainly concerned with those major poets of whom we are so justly proud, and the other *The English Heart*, for which Clive Sansom is responsible (Falcon Press, 5s.), which follows much the same plan but makes, as is inevitable, a different choice.

A little book entitled simply *Poems, 1938-1943*, by Margaret Freeman (Street, 3s. 6d.), has come into our hands by an unusual route, but nevertheless we should wish to say a word of commendation for it. There is a certain distinction in this poet's use of words which is to be encouraged, although not in every poem is it entirely successful. But nevertheless it has that quality, half sybilline, which this sort of vibrant language evokes. Let us quote "Catullus 101", which might have been a sonnet had it not been so ruthlessly truncated. There is genuine feeling in this fragment, and the quality of the diction which we have noticed will be easily remarked therein:

"From many lands and many waters passed,
My brother, to thy tomb, uncomforted
I come to pay the dues of death at last,
And give vain greeting to the silent dead.
Uncomforted for this, the theft of doom,
I mourn thee, brother, snatched before thy years
Yet in the ancient way our fathers tell,
Thy cheerless dues I offer at thy tomb;
Take the long flowing of thy brother's tears,
And hail, forever, brother, and farewell."

Any book of poems or verse which is adorned with a Foreword by Miss V. Sackville-West must receive the attention of a conscientious reviewer. *Poems of the Land Army*, an anthology of verse by members of that organisation which may be ordered from "The Land Girl", 6 Chesham Street, London, S.W.1 (post free, 2s. 9d.), contains much that is worth preserving not only as a record of a historic effort but for its poetry. That there are also poems of a lighter vein, humorous and perhaps, on a sober assessment, trivial, is after all proper to such a collection as this. It is enough for us that youth should find an impulse in stirring times and in unaccustomed conditions to express itself metrically. Poetry is a

part of nearly all of us, and the proof which such little books as this provides for this assertion is welcome.

Translations of poetry from foreign tongues are usually most disappointing things, for poetry in its essence resides in the subtleties of language, buried sometimes so deep that one must read a poem twice or thrice before the jewel comes to light. How is one to translate a subtlety which may be no more than the inspired order of words or their choice under the compulsion of some purely national association which the foreigner may not recognise, and in any case, if he did, cannot reproduce in another tongue. Poetry makes the profoundest use of language, profounder far than any lesser literary art can possibly do, and it is therefore necessary for the translator to be as familiar with the foreign tongue as his own, a thing which must be rare indeed. But even so he would still be faced with the impossibility of translating the untranslatable.

These reflections were inspired by two books, the first of which is *Pushkin's Poems*, translated by Walter Morison (Allen & Unwin, 5s.). These poems strike us as being more than competently translated, and they have of course the interest that we can here make some acquaintance with the work of a very celebrated poet. But, if this were all, one might wonder why Pushkin was so celebrated. This is not a criticism, however, of the translator's ability, nor even of his understanding and love of the originals. Much there is in these translations of the poet's vigour both of expression and of thought, but there we must leave it.

The other is an anthology of translations of *Modern Czech Poetry*, done by Ewald Osers and J. K. Montgomery (Allen & Unwin, 5s.), a quite varied collection, some of it in traditional forms, others in a more modern idiom. Formless poetry, however, when comprehensible, would probably translate better than the classical, and for the very reason that it will contain less of that mysterious overtone which is the prerogative of musical poetry and of language chiselled to fit a difficult form and rhyme. Here again there is interest, as it were through a veil, in making the acquaintance of work which must otherwise have remained hidden from us. The success of these translations seems to us, however, to vary; at times there is a real capture of emotion, at others there is an equally real flatness of prosaic statement. Nevertheless, we commend an enterprise which seeks to throw down any barriers which limit the universality of art.

A little volume of *Poems*, by Andrew Keith (King, Littlewood & King, 2s. 6d.), contains some 53 pages of light, tuneful verse, sincere enough but not very important. The author is really indulging a gift for words and word-music, and should be encouraged against the time when he can realise profounder depths and bring them to us in equally tuneful fashion. He needs, however, to sharpen his skill, for there are occasions in this book where one encounters a rhyme which has not that complete inevitability and exactitude which is the necessity of the poet's craft. This rhyming difficulty leads him occasionally into extravagance of expression, but this fault will disappear with a deepening of his own consciousness and the exercise of his verbal talent.

Pendulum Publications send us *For Whom There is no Spring*, by Sydney D. Tremayne (1s.), which is both too short and in too impermanent a dress, for the author can be sincerely and beautifully lyrical and seemingly without effort, which is of course as it must be. We were at once struck by this first verse of a poem whose title is the last line of our quotation, for there is tenderness and understanding in these simple words, and in consequence an effortless evocation of real poetry. Not all of these poems are about nature or inspired by it, but

everywhere there is an equal evidence that his work receives its major impulse from his emotional depths, collecting as it were on its way the collaboration of his mind and pen:

"Spring, and the crabbed thorn
Aspires to weave a crown. Where woods burn green
Only the last leaves mourn
Flickering softly in an alien wind.
In April's unconcern
Mourner and mourned are done, are down, are gone.
Soft, soft is this forgetting."

Books for children are difficult to criticise, because one never knows how far the author is deliberately writing down to what he or she imagines to be the childish intelligence. *The Poetical Ark*, by Sylvia Read (Acorn Press, 3s. 6d.) evinces no high opinion of that intelligence, but here again we do not know at which degree of infancy the authoress was aiming. Suffice it to say that her verses appear to us to be too simple for their themes. The grip upon immortality which the nursery rhyme has taken is proof enough, surely, of what very young children really like, and Sylvia Read's little poems certainly have not that simple unreality which is the most compelling quality of the nursery classic.

Another small book, *Smoke*, by Lilian Bryne Thomas (Johns, Newport, 3s. 6d.), practises another sort of simplicity, the principal characteristic of which is a reliance upon words and a certain deftness of technique without either an emotional disturbance or much effort of thought. The poems are slight, although well phrased, but present one with little in return for reading them.

A slim volume called *Joy and Other Verse*, by Christiane Tilley (Stockwell, 6d.), does nothing to revise our oft-expressed view that if a poet must adopt the modern idiom—and it can only be regarded as regrettable that he must—it is more than ever essential that he should first submit himself to the discipline of writing in traditional forms, and thus learn to master his craft and acquire that concentrated economy of expression and perfection in the choice and arrangement of words which alone can make free verse acceptable. This is a lesson which Miss Tilley has not yet learned; and with it we commend to her notice the urgent necessity of comprehensibility. There is a surrealistic note about some of her verse which would possibly be purged away by the kind of discipline we have mentioned.

Blank verse of an altogether different quality is *Each Silver Fly*, by Frank Kendon (Cambridge University Press, 1s. 6d.). This is the Seatonian Prize Poem for 1945, now published, and worthy in every respect to take its place on the bookshelves in free competition with anything which is being produced to-day. It has been said that if a man is going to write poetry he will probably be writing it in his teens, and, while we do not know the age of the author of this poem, it seems fair to deduce from the circumstances of its publication that he is not too far from proof of this contention. The poem has its unevennesses and moments of flatness, but seldom does it lack that musical pulse which marks it out at once from the indifferent and the merely prosaic. We quote a few lines which fairly indicate its quality:

"Long afterwards—in thrice benevolent age,
Under the boughs, in middest of the heat,
Fresh children making musical his vineyards—
Carboys of oil on asses two by two,
Deep-uddered velvet kine, and small-hoofed sheep

(the noble rams with sweeping ridgy horns
Bowing down their heads) beyond his shade
Passed, in procession of content and health,
Every day before his flower-like eyes."

Whatever the age of the author, there is evidence of maturity of that ageless sort which, so far as we know, is the prerogative only of the artist, and of these principally the poet. This is not, so to speak, a profound wisdom, but has all that authenticity which we greet with an "of course", not because it is stale and familiar but because it possesses that quality of instant conviction which claims agreement without difficulty. This quality, we like to think, is that which, more surely than any other, indicates the true poet, who is one who has, by virtue of an acuter perception and a surer balance, a wider freedom and a securer hold upon the eternal truths. Here is a short excerpt which states, of course, an old truth but which, by its almost casual diction, manages somehow actually to add emphasis to minds which tend to forget such things:

"What is our scope? In what first quarry lay
This jewel of Fair-dealing? (For the cheat
Hates cheats, the cruel, cruelty,
And those who pitch down undiscerning death
From fair skies upon ill cities desire
Above all things an acceptable justification:
But a just balance and scales are the Lord's.)"

"Whoever reviewed current verse in your July number is a nincompoop. His dismissal of Henry Reed's *Map of Verona* is unjust, and his critical method pompous, inefficient and absurd."

Thus begins a letter from a correspondent who has obviously more energy than sense, or he would have abstained from prejudicing his case so grievously at the outset. There is a certain antique piquancy in receiving abuse from one who can advance no better reason for it than a difference of opinion, and Mr. Henry Reed, the bone of contention, might well wish to be saved from such a friend. Our correspondent quarrels too with our eminent doctor's theory of poetic vitamins and proceeds to adduce examples of great poetry which he alleges are starved of all three, which our readers may remember are mystery, ecstasy and sublimity. We gravely doubt his perception. He asserts, truly enough, that there are many kinds of poetry and argues somewhat triumphantly, as one making an unanswerable point, that we do not admonish Camembert for not being Stilton: but surely our correspondent is in some confusion here, since Camembert and Stilton both in their separate ways have the character of the best cheese, and indeed may both be said to possess ecstasy and sublimity, and more than a little touch of mystery. We insist upon uniformity as little in poetry as in our food. In both, however, there must be edibility, digestibility and nourishment, and we must feel when we have consumed them that we are the better for it. In any case, it is not the poetry, nor the cheese, which we admonish, but rather the person responsible for it; in the case of cheese we should be furious at any misdescription of the article, hailing the miscreant guilty of the deception before a magistrate. Unfortunately the written word enjoys an immunity which permits it to call itself what it will. On the other hand, we too have equal freedom and may speak our mind concerning it.

Lastly, our correspondent offers us three mere literary virtues in exchange for our bright trinity of poetic qualities. These are clarity, conciseness and pene-

tration, and the dull deliberation of this denial of the spiritual quality of poetry is really the last straw. Our correspondent signs his letter; but since it was written in heat and apparently without proper reflection it would be inconsiderate to give his name.

PROFESSOR MOROZOV ON ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF RUSSIAN POETS

(Special to THE POETRY REVIEW from Moscow)

An interesting talk on translations of Russian poets was given recently at the Foreign Literature Library, Moscow, by Professor Mikhail Morozov, a scholar of English literature. The subject attracted many philologists and teachers of English.

In referring to the literal and free methods of translation, Morozov quoted as an example of the latter Byron's "Hebrew Melodies", translated by the Russian poet, Mikhail Lermontov. This is a poetic translation in which the poem's gloomy colouring and feeling are kept. Another instance is Walter Scott's "Baron of Smalholm", which was translated by Vassili Zhukovsky, a Russian poet of the early nineteenth century.

Professor Morozov maintained that the literal translation is not always the best method of conveying the merits of the original. Exactitude may be impossible or even harmful. For example, the sparkling idiom of the comedies of Alexander Ostrovsky, a Russian playwright of the second part of the nineteenth century, cannot be reproduced in literal translation. A contemporary English translater, David Magarshak, has found an excellent way out of the difficulty. Although not striving for a formal interpretation of the text he nevertheless succeeds in giving the spirit of the comedy "Easy Money" and others. These are living English reproductions of the Russian originals.

Passing to a general review of translations of Russian poetry, the lecturer reminded his audience of the "Russkaya Anthologia" compiled by John Bowring in 1821; this includes translations of many Russian poets of the close of the 18th and opening of the 19th centuries—Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Karamzin, Zhukovsky and Krylov. The first translations of Pushkin's poetry were made by the English traveller and philologist, George Borrow, who visited St. Petersburg. They were very exact, particularly the fragments from "The Gypsies", "The Black Shawl" and the "Talisman". While they have preserved the word-texture of the poems, they give no conception of their poetic significance and importance. The magnitude of Pushkin remains incomprehensible to the English reader. The same may be said of the translation of Mikhail Lermontov's famous "Demon", translated by Stevenson in 1875. And it so often happens that the inadequacy of the translation conceals the creative work of the greatest of the Russian poets from English readers. This is particularly true of the inimitable simplicity and directness of Pushkin's verse. In this respect the translation of his "I remember a wonderful moment", made by Thomas Budge Shaw, in 1845, may be called successful. Though it is not faultless in wording, it has the intimate warmth and charm of the original.

Still, most of the translations of poetry in the 19th century must be regarded as feeble: even when they are correct, they fail to give the sound and indirect meaning of the words. A striking example is the translation of Alexander Fet's well-known lyric, "A whisper, a fluttering breath, the trilling of a nightingale", which is included in the anthology, "Rhymes from the Russian", by John Pollen

(1891). Though it is correct, the translation bears little resemblance to Fet's poem. It might be Swinburne, and very poor Swinburne at that. This is the worst form of translation—the "substitution" of the poet. Far more satisfactory is the translation of the same poem by Hewitt in Bowra's "Book of Russian Verse" (1943). Here the translator has not aimed at formal exactitude but striven for the elusive intonation, rhythm and texture of the imagery, and in this he has succeeded.

In general, twentieth century translators have been successful with the Russian poets. In this field the service rendered by Professor Oliver Elton must be gratefully acknowledged. His translation of Pushkin's "Tale of the Tsar Sultan" cannot be too highly praised, for the freshness of the imagery, intonation and rhythm of the "Tale" have been preserved. The translation of "Eugene Onegin" is much less successful: here the variety and richness of Pushkin's vocabulary is unfortunately lost in the English text.

Professor Morozov pointed out the difficulties of translating Soviet poets into English. In his opinion, the English poets of to-day, T. S. Eliot, for example, write in too abstract a manner, and it would be difficult for them to master the concrete sound of Soviet verse. Nevertheless, some successes must be noted, among them Alan Moray William's translations of Simonov's "Wait For Me!" and Surkov's "Girls of our Country". This translator conveys the intonations and rhythm. His translations have been included in the anthology compiled by him and an admirer of Soviet poetry, Professor Vivian de Sola Pinto, who has done much to promote closer understanding between the English and Soviet poetic cultures.

Professor G. Thomson, Professor of Greek at Birmingham University, speaking about the origins of poetry, said Greek and English poetry provided perhaps the finest examples of civilised poetry, ancient and modern. Poetry had grown out of magic, which was founded on the principle that, by creating the illusion that you control reality, you can actually control it. In the course of its long history the art of poetry had travelled a long way from magic, but the connection had not been broken. The function of magic was to change the external world by changing man's subjective attitude towards it; that was still the essential function of poetry.

In the beginning, the three arts of poetry, music and dancing were one. They all went back to the rhythmical movement of the body engaged in collective labour. This movement had two components. The corporal element was the germ of the dance, which was simply an orderly, expressive bodily movement; and the oral element was the germ of language, which, starting from inarticulate cries discarded by the voice and reproduced by percussion with tools, became the nucleus of instrumental music. In English poetry the element of rhythmical design survived only sporadically, and so the literary critics—who were not interested in the origins of poetry—had failed to notice it.

John Buxton's "Atropos and Other Poems", complementary to his earlier collection "Such Liberty", published while he was still a prisoner in Germany, is announced for publication in the autumn by Messrs. Macmillan & Co., together with "The Madness of Merlin" Part I of an unfinished poetic drama in three parts to which Laurence Binyon devoted much of the thought and attention he could give to his literary work during many busy years.

It is interesting to learn a little of the life of Loyd Haberly, the author of *Silent Fame and Other Poems* (MacMillan). His native state is Oregon, and England, which he knew as a Rhodes Scholar and a village craftsman, make his background. After Oxford he remained in England where he was known for his beautiful hand-printed, hand-bound books. Upon his return to America he lectured at Harvard before setting up his own press in St. Louis. He has published privately many volumes of his poetry.

"The Choice" gives us an immediate insight into the character of Mr. Haberly.

"A time comes when a man must face
His Maker and define his place:
When he must choose, as for a duel,
Then to it pledge perfection's price
Of full and final sacrifice,
And wage, to triumph or defeat,
A lonely war where no drums beat."

There is a light touch, as well as profundity, in these poems, as shown in "Wisdom's Warning":

"The almond shows
The first faint rose
Above the dawn of Spring.
And little wrens
To please their hens
Fluff out their throats and sing.

To-day I hear
This warning clear
In every plover's wing:
Hark and Behold!
For all are old
When they forget the Spring."

The First Century of New England Verse, collected by Harold S. Jantz and reprinted from the proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass., contains 292 pages of industrious research.

It is immensely interesting to this reviewer, who has had the privilege of reviewing most of Robinson Jeffers' books, to find that at last he has turned to classic drama led by *Medea* of Euripides (Random House). In the thought this writer stands foremost among the American poets. Now we are to have the privilege of knowing what he will do with the drama. Having small knowledge of the classics I am stumped, but I want to say that there comes a time in your life as a poet, if you live long enough, that you just have to write a poetic drama. I came to that point some years ago and there are some six poetic dramas to be published shortly. Mr. Jeffers undoubtedly chose Medea because of her extraordinary relationship to the esoteric. She was a famous sorceress—of course a sorceress has beauty!

A great love is a fire
That burns the beams of the roof.
The doorposts are flaming and the house falls.
A great love is a lion in the cattle-pen,
The herd goes mad, the heifers run bawling
And the claws are in their flanks.
Too much love is an armed robber in the treasury,
He has killed the guards and he walks in blood.

Here is Mr. Jeffers at his valiant best. In how different a mood is the following:

For only to be alive and to see the light
Is beautiful. Only to see the light;

To see a blade of young grass,
Or the gray face of a stone.

There is something most gratifying to find there is a sisterhood in the arts. Leonora Speyer first became known for her exceptionally beautiful violin playing. The present collection consists of *Slow Wall*, originally published 1939, and more than 20 new poems which have not before appeared in book form (Alfred A. Knopf).

One is surely drawn to "Sonnets to the Beloved"—for who has not lost one dearly beloved?

If from your travel's end so cruel-swift,
You grieve who ever grieved when distance spread
Its leafless range, impatient at the rift
Reaching between us, most beloved dead,
Know if you still may know of happenings here,
That mile on mile, by measure of each day,
The rift death fashioned narrows as I near,
And that I journey light along the way,
Be patient then as I—as I would be.
What if the length be long? It is the last.
Be patient, friend who so out-distanced me,
For swift or slow, I follow where you passed.
O meagre cry to dust immaculate!
And shall the living tell the dead to wait?

"Full oft chance throws in absent minded trend, her magic dice." I certainly did not think to meet Mrs. Speyer in Delhi, but there we met, at the best jewellers. She was buying necklaces for her daughters, and I?—I was just buying! I enquired at once, "Oh, Mrs. Speyer, have you written your sonnet to the Taj Mahal?" And she said, "Not yet!" I said smartly, "*I* have!" It was a pleasant meeting, one of several.

The last poem in this present book is without title, but you, also, will like it.

Let not my death be long,
But light as a bird swinging;
Happy decision in the height
Of song—
Then flight
From off the ultimate bough.
And let my wing be strong,
And my last note the first
Of another's singing,
See to it. Thou!

Our weary and confused world has one thing to be profoundly grateful for—the radio; Mrs. Speyer writes of it—"Broadcast":

And listening,
Knowing they listen,
We are together.
The intemperate tides of waters unaware,
Wide-moving,
Are rolled away—
A voice has done this thing—
A fluent box of man's contriving,

Of wire and tube,
A dial the finger finds—
From out the shaken ether,
Tumult of startled air,
A path of speech unwinds like any thoroughfare.
And now we are together,
Together in our far lands,
We meet at the crossroads of sound,
We are bound by a tether of words,
We sit, alone and together,
Listening,
Clasping hands.

Capt. O. Irving Jacobsen (Bruce Humphries) has given us in *Honor Above All* a touching tale of three heroes, Jo, Bill and John. Capt. Jacobsen is well known as a writer of many songs, lyrics and five operettas. We turn to a poem entitled "Overseas":

Upon a pier in New York Bay,
Four comrades looked about
At far-flung sea-lanes, stretched away
Across the east, far out!
John spoke quite slowly to the three:
"Well, fellows, this is it!
For soon we'll know what war can be,
And if descriptions fit."
"We've worked and trained, both long and late,
Most eagerly," said Joe.
"Now that it's time, we hesitate,
Yet something bids us go!"
And as the city slept that night
Their transport slipped away
Out past the statue that now might
Be seen only by day.
The boys aboard were fast asleep,
In dreams of days now gone,
Not knowing they were on the deep
Atlantic, moving on!
Out o'er the vastness dark and dim,
Their light, the stars above,
The transport moved gravely, and grim,
Away from all they love!
The spacious land now left behind,
The land of liberty,
The land of each and ev'ry kind
of opportunity;
The land of rising mountain heights,
Of rivers, lakes, and plains,
The land of peace and sacred rights,
Our greatest guarded gains.
Her sons go forth to fight and die
To save our heritage,

That freedom's torch may be held high
Through ev'ry future age,
To keep our banner flying high,
The stars and stripes we love,
Which got their colors from the sky
As seen at dawn, above.

You will wish to know something about James E. Warren, for you are going to like his *Against the Furious Men* (The Banner Press, Georgia). He was born in Atlanta, Ga., in 1908, educated in public schools there, and holds the A.B. and M.A. degrees from Emory University. In 1937 he was awarded the annual prize of The Poetry Society of America. This appears to be his second volume, and the poems are arranged in the chronological order of their composition, coloured by his visit to England in 1938 and attendance at Cambridge University, the beginning of World War II, and his service of nearly three years in the Army Air Forces. "Guard Duty" follows:

Long in the gloom on limb and stone
  The bats and beetles work their will;
  Over the town, on tattered wings
Moths flutter up to feel the moon;

Circling and cold in toneless caves,
  The eyeless fish brush fin to fin
  Thick spiders quick on velvet stilts
Rustle against their sinuous loves.

Six hours to wait! Six hours till sleep!
  (Where sleep alone is kind to men)
  Feeling the flow of dark begin,
Hearing the high stars' silver drip.

But night stands bravely star to star;
  The winds of night are proud and tall;
  And I am warm and one with all
Who seek their love across the dark.

And again, we read "Volunteers":

Our loves, look on the bodies of old kings
  Dreaming in coffins with enameled eyes—
Lonely in linen, lost in tarnished rings,
The neat and dusty bones. O but the wise
Die swiftly when they die; they leave in flames,
Feeling the lovely flesh unfit for tombs,
Fit only for the sun and for such dooms
As come to daisies withered without names.

Now we may fling the casual flesh aside
With a completest honor if from places
Grown sweet to us your last farewells are cried
Down all the worlds that we may battle through,
If we shall fall with fire upon our faces,
If we shall lie remembered well by you.

The publisher, Bruce Humphries, very well describes the poems in *Burning Weeds*, by Milford E. Shields, of First Snowfall, Heralding of Spring—this new book of poems is a seasonal chant. A poem entitled "Dead Rose" reminds me of one I wrote some years ago, "The rose is still the rose my dear though every petal fall":

Her powers gone, the rose is dead;
She withers in a sigh;
The perfume seeps from fading red
And petals cool and dry.

Yet she was rose intensely sweet,
Was beautiful to see;
Her loveliness, a thing complete,
Is beauty still for me.

Surely "Half Moon" is a song:

The moon was new when I met you,
And the world, was, too.
And the moon grew round in the love we found.

The full moon broke as the blitzes spoke,
Into half it broke.
One half was gone as you winged up and on.

The half moon hung like a song half sung
By our love still young—
The shattered part seals my bleeding heart.

And the half moon's yours; as you fly its shores
You're above death's lures—
It will light your arc—while I keep the dark.

Crusade, by Capt. John Waller (Born 1917 at Oxford) (The Macmillan Co.).

Perhaps you wonder, reader, as I often do, how much a distinguished ancestry can measure the worth of a man. We here in America have striking examples of men who, like Lincoln, sprang from no distinguished ancestry and rose in his thought and acts to one of the great positions of life, a friend of my grandfather, Joseph Parrish Thompson, and a friend to all mankind. That slavery should exist in this land so well started was too abominable a thought for Lincoln to entertain.

Capt. John Waller, the author of *Crusade*, comes from a very distinguished family, and in every touch of his pen he proves it. There are some 40 poems in this collection, and if you care to read fine thought, ably expressed, buy the book.

The last poem in the book is fascinating, though with the grim title of "The Meaning of War":

How frequently the last time
Comes and we do not know
That this is indeed the last time
Before all shadows flow
Into a snow of memory
Where memory locks the gates
Of that ice-bound palace garden
Where a few wander like ghosts.

Childhood days by a river
To Khaki dreams on a beach
Are usual recollections
That you or I may reach;
But those who deal in hazards
And take what dealing gives
Can never know the last time
In good or fatal moves.

The last time I see people
Is simple as goodbye,
Peter on Weymouth Station
Or Kay going home to die.
Goodbye is always a warning
Till the next time we meet
That death is most wary, lurking
Behind unwary feet.

ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

AN AMERICAN POET SUPPLEMENTS OUR AMERICAN EDITOR'S DYNAMIC REVIEW

I am grateful to you for your interest in my work. As I am not sure how much information Dutton sent out with review copies, I will risk repeating some of it in the following.

Certainly poetry and painting are closely related. In art classes at the University of California I learned much about essential aspects of writing and I used sometimes to conceive of literary projects in terms of visual patterns. But now I feel that the arts are all pretty much one thing: superficially differing means of evoking those "gestures of the spirit" (Roger Sessions' phrase) which shape and sustain a valuable human experience.

Though I believe I had, to begin with, more obvious talent as a painter, I became a writer perhaps because of a need to deal with the changing stream of experience. Perhaps, too, I felt the need to struggle with the semantic element in language because, being sensitive to it, I needed to control it for myself. This need led me to study philosophy, and particularly epistemology. And it is the main motive in section IV of *Against the Circle*, where I deal explicitly with the tendency of our knowledge to assume narrow or distorted forms, in which our life itself is imprisoned and deformed and by the reform of which life may be served.

In painting I am more attracted by landscape than seascape. Possibly that is because the land forms are more easily observed. But it is the architectural that satisfies me most. When I draw or paint the ocean, there is always some prominent land structure in the scene. And I have always drawn animals. The abstractions of the sky attract me very much, but I rarely paint them. They seem nearer to music, changing and ethereal as they are. Forms of sky and sea are inconstant and frequently rhythmical. That may be why I more often put them into poetry than into pictures.

Since form organizes our consciousness, it determines our being. Because a certain selectiveness in observation is possible, we are not at the mercy of our surroundings. But they may nourish us greatly if they are of the right kind, or

they may tend to cancel us away. Art, for me, is a means of self-preservation and discovery. But so also is the natural world; it is an esthetic instrument. Some of all this is explicit in "The Silence of the Mind", "What Other Man", "Meditation in Exile", and other poems in *Against the Circle.* It is implicit in a great many more, such as "Needle to be Threaded".

Salt Lake City, Feb. 27. BREWSTER GHISELIN.

The place of poetry in a world of war and scientific practicality was evaluated and affirmed by speakers at the annual luncheon of the Poetry Society of America. Addressing 250 members of the society at Sherry's, 300, Park Avenue, Dr. Irwin Edman, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University; Max Eastman, poet and critic; Russell Davenport, editor and poet, and other speakers prophesied an imminent renaissance of poetry, as the art best able to express the human values for which the world is fighting.

Confessing "an uneasiness as to the moral function of poetry in a world crossed by the agony of war," Dr. Edman, who is a poet as well as a philosopher, suggested as answer for "our brazen, smug or exquisite concern with poetry." "Poetry," he declared, "with music, with pictorial vividness and intellectual integrity, illuminates the values, the ends and the purposes which have permanent human vitality. . . . Except for poetry the world would be a shambles of ill-will and chaos. If anyone concerned with politics and economics asks us what we are doing with poetry and philosophy right now, I think we can answer that it is in the best of poetry and the best of philosophy that the human race is reminded of what all the shooting is for."

Mr. Eastman, who defined poetry as "the use of words not in order to record or convey information, but in order to cherish or to communicate experience," sounded a sturdy appeal against the forces of contemporary materialism, and warned that poetry must be defended not only against practicality, but against "the cult of unintelligibility." "I think we should meet this age of science head on," he declared, "by defending the lyric in its purest form."

J. Donald Adams, former editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, and author of *The Shape of Books to Come*, took office as president of the society, and presented the medal to Alfred Kreymborg, retiring president. "Poetry stands on the threshold of a new period," Mr. Adams asserted. "The time is now near when there will be a consolidation of what has been gained in the modern movement in poetry with a new revaluation and appreciation of what has been good in the past."

Mr. Davenport, who read a section of his long poem, "My Country," declared that the poets of the future "must search for the speech of the people." "Poetry," he said, "is essential to civilization. It is, therefore, necessary to use it, not only in the sense of pamphleteering, but in the realization that there is a function that poetry can perform which is uniquely poetic, and that there is no substitute for it. I believe that more and more poets are going to discover that in terms of the people's idiom."

The Yale University Press give us a lead in the following statement:

1. The Yale Series of Younger Poets is open to American citizens who are under thirty years of age at the time the manuscript is submitted and who have not previously published a volume of verse.
2. The competition closes on March 1st of each year and manuscripts should

not be sent to the Editor before February 1st. The best manuscript submitted in each competition is, if recommended by the Editor, published at the expense of the Yale University Press, the author receiving a prize of $100 and the usual 10 per cent. royalty on all copies of his book sold in the United States. The Yale University Press does not, however, guarantee to issue a volume as the result of each competition, if, in the opinion of the Editor, no manuscript submitted is worthy of publication in the Series.

3. The format of the Series calls for a volume of from forty-eight to sixty-four pages, with a maximum of forty lines to a page. The title-page should bear the author's full name and address in the upper right-hand corner. Manuscripts should be typewritten and should contain a title-page and table of contents. The pages should be numbered consecutively throughout, beginning with the title-page. There should be not more than one poem on a page. An addressed return envelope should be enclosed with the manuscript, so that it may be returned by express collect if it is not selected.
4. All verse must be original; translations are not acceptable. It is permissible to include poems previously published in periodicals or newspapers, if the consent of such journals can be obtained.
5. An unsuccessful manuscript may be revised and resubmitted the next year.
6. Approximately three months is required for judging manuscripts, so that a decision will usually not be given before June.
7. The Yale University Press cannot be responsible for the loss of manuscripts while in its possession or in transit.
8. Contestants should address manuscripts and correspondence to the Editor, Yale Series of Younger Poets, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

Lieutenant (S) R. L. Cook, R.N., who has already edited (for distribution inside the Navy only), five issues of a Broadsheet of Fleet Poetry, intends to amplify and perpetuate this Broadsheet on the lines given in the following notice: Contributions are invited for collections of poetry by men and women now serving in or who have served in the Navy (including W.R.N.S., Q.A.R.N.N.S., V.A.D. and Admiralty Civilians) or the Merchant Navy. It is hoped to publish these collections at irregular intervals for sale to the general public under the probable title of "Fleet Poetry". Verse of any sort and on any subject (but excluding humorous) is required and should be sent to:—The Editor, "Fleet Poetry", 12 Plewlands Gardens, Edinburgh, 10, Scotland, either in typescript or legible handwriting and the full name, rank or rating, official number, naval address (if any) and home address of the author must accompany each submission. If a "pen-name" is used the above details must also be supplied. It will not be possible to return unsuitable contributions but those whose work is published will be notified at their home addresses. There is no closing date for contributions since it is hoped that the collections will continue to appear periodically.

Ten British demobilized poets, playwright and novelists—nine men and one girl—have received prizes of £250 ($1,000) from the £12,500 Rockefeller Fund designed to help English writers whose creative work was interrupted by the war. Those selected included John Buxton, Laurence Whistler, Arthur Teece, and George Scott-Moncrieff.

LIAISON OR ISOLATION

What is the place of the poet in society? has been asked and answered several times lately and many times during the centuries, passionately by poets, brilliantly by philosophers, academically by students and unconsciously by the masses of indifferent people of society itself; and each answer is an individual opinion, almost a matter of vocabulary. It is easier to realise the position of one poet or one school of poetry than it is to embrace the whole company and define its relationship clearly, since each poet's philosophy, and each philosopher's poetry has a different significance and puts forward a different claim to recognition in the eyes of society. And now, with more poetry and verse being published than ever before, it becomes harder for us to realise where and how it can fit, or, in some cases, what and why is its meaning.

We are as far from the Shelley and Coleridge conceptions of the poet as we are from stagecoaches as methods of travelling, although we are still fascinated by the picturesque charm of both. It is not only science that has progressed. Paolo's delight at reading Tasso to Francesca under the scented trees of Rimini would be difficult to recapture by reading Auden to the girl-friend in Leicester Square. Something has changed and we have changed with it. No longer has poetry the same meaning for us, and poets have met the change with equivalent alterations in their style and mood. But this has not reserved for them the same place automatically. The place of poets in society is by no means hereditary. There can be no such thing as a modern Wordsworth, or a surrealist Milton, or a symbolist Keats, or even this war's Brooke or Owen or Rosenberg. The mistake, so often made, springs from a similarity of style, or perhaps stylishness, message or meaning, and the immensely satisfying identification of a train of thought. Few people realise the effect or size of the separate impacts upon themselves; nor do they try to discover the reason for these impacts. It is not only by appreciating the poetic value and effect, but also by knowing fully the historical background of development that a true understanding of the poet's place can be held. And how few, how very few can aspire to this knowledge. It is from these few that the theories come; theories that range from "unacknowledged legislators" right down to "pretty luxuries"—theories that are at variance with each other from beginning to end. Who, it might well be asked, has the right to set the poet in any place in the complex society of the twentieth century? The answer might well be, "the complex society itself." If we determine by numbers it appears that the poet has no place whatsoever, that he is merely borne on the books additionally, for no fixed purpose. If we judge by the evidence of the informed minority we come face to face with the blasts and counterblasts of personal prejudices. This unsatisfactory confusion has its root in the poets themselves who are by no means certain of their importance since they have been misguided by the lessening number of acclaimed successes into suffering meaningless paroxysms that, publicly at any rate, are no more than bursting balloons without the bang. They have become involved in a race against each other; a race for a prize to which each one has heavily subscribed, and yet which is without value. It is the prize of victory within the small circle, a Pyrrhic victory that will leave the world untouched. Mr. Francis Scarfe's *Auden and After* is an interesting commentary on the progress of the race. I felt that the title was an incomplete description of the positions of the competitors, Auden in the lead, and after?—MacNeice,

Lewis, Spender, Thomas, Barker, Prokosch, the team of apocalyptics, and a multitude of epileptics, overtaking, falling back, slipping and cheating; the hare, being steadily overhauled, looked like T. S. Eliot. If this competition were not so personal it would be a magnificent joke in the Huxley manner. The joke is denied, however, because poetry is still being written, in spite of this passionate preoccupation. It is tossed over the railings into the rows of spectators, sometimes in the form of mud, sometimes as a bouquet, but poetry nevertheless, however much it saddens us to receive so little attention.

We do not moan the lack of a Mayakovsky, or a Slowacki or even a Whitman or a Burns because our nation is not at the moment in the mood for a leadership of that nature. But we do regret the lost ideal of the poet, the ideal of producing poetry not as an entrance fee to the never-ending poets' marathon, but as a liaison with society, by which and from which a deeper understanding can be drawn and with which we can look more intelligently and appreciatively at the matters that concern us all.

Are the present "fragments" sufficient shores against our ruins? How long can we survive the Shantih shantih shantih?

Sub.-Lt., R.N.V.R. ROWAN AYERS.

What is "Great" Poetry?

Mr. Row's excellent list of definitions of poetry upholds my contention that poetry, as such, has never been defined. The term "definition" suggests a fixed or an agreed-on meaning of a word. Where every individual has worked out his own definition, there is no definition, as it is neither fixed nor agreed on.

There is either no disagreement or at least very slight variances in the definitions having to do with the exact science. A considerable divergence appears in the definition of history. The divergence is complete in poetry.

I believe that we will agree that prose is a conveyance through agreed-on signs and, generally, definitions, of narration, description and exposition, e.g., water is a compound of hydrogen and oxygen. I have never known any great divergence from this simple statement. However, the arts—music, painting, sculpture and poetry seem to have within the mass of verbiage about them one element in common: They attempt "the conveyance of an impression or idea". This impression actually has no time; in fact, it may be past, present or future: it may be fragmentary or the whole. I am a bit diffident in the use of any adjective; however, the one seemingly generally applicable is "psychological" or "the conveyance of a psychological impression or idea". The introduction of this adjective, however, is my undoing, for then the naturally wide variance of "conveyance" becomes obvious: from the sane to the insane, from the moron to the genius. Conveyance suggests the carrying of a cargo from a definite point to a definite point. A harborless ship that sails in circles is rather absurd.

At this point it is easy to see that a great artistic period is somewhat democratic in that it must root in a considerable number of persons. The conveyance is from artist to audience. For instance, the psychological wounds of pleasure or pain must reconstruct themselves in the minds of those similarly wounded. Winter's ice, snow, freezing has a common point of interest for us in "Greasy Joan doth keel the pot". Therefore, I have no quarrel with any definition of poetry but with all of them. They are all wrong. The definition, if it were possible to con-

struct, would be something of a synthesis of all. Also I have no quarrel with any school of poetry. None are perfect; probably the absolute would again be a synthesis. What I do believe is a matter for debate on what is "great" poetry. Because the matter to be defined is not poetry as we dub it, for much of this is not poetry at all. A bit of psycho-analysis of the individual's output, however, could possibly determine somewhat inexactly the human sympathy or understanding of the potential Burns or Shakespeare. But the trial-and-error method of time has always applied and will probably continue *ad infinitum.*

The great poet must be sensitive to impression, his impressions must have a similarity in the minds or roots of many; he must retain and have the ability to reconstruct his impressions and reconvey through agreed-on signs, oral or written, this impression and finally and probably the most important link in the cycle, it must be understood intellectually or emotionally or both and recreate a similar or identical impression of pleasure or pain in the minds of the appreciators. A great poem has some of the power of hypnosis.

The individualistic modern chants in a grand isolation. He probably conveys his somewhat psychopathic impressions to a few similar psychopaths who scream their adulation; however, his psychological wounds and recreation are such that, right or wrong—presuming that we are the psychopaths, he can never be a "great" poet. I repeat a poet becomes great only through his conveyance of an impression to an audience. It is they that dub him "great"—those appreciative Toms, Dicks and Harrys, my Lord Such-and such, the ditch digger, the sailor Masefield, the erudite Santayana and so on. They are the persons who make the man Chaucer the great Chaucer; they are the ones who knighted Shakespeare.

It would seem that I am stating that a poet to be great must be popular; whereas, a popular poet is never great. There are standards even to a limited popularity. You may note the wide list of appreciators in the preceding paragraph. The critic doesn't make the standards; again it is the appreciator. I won't use the terms "good taste" or "sensitiveness"; this group merely has the necessary innate intelligence, sympathy, understanding and an ability to weigh values in life's essences. The critic merely checks the balances.

Of the tricks or tools to convey impression, probably the simplest are images; sound also reconstructs; to mention a weed brings its aroma and its associations. An impression cannot go beyond realism; any such attempt is an immediate failure. Granted that abstractions are the only provable facts in life and that the so-called facts may be, for all we know, illusions. But the concept of the mind—the greatest mind is "cabined, cribbed, confined" and married to death to that state which makes the questionable real. Probably the simplest test of "beyond realism" lies in one's ability to describe anything in mental concept that is greater than man. God, some say. But the moment one attempts to convey the impression of God, he turns either to unimagistic abstractions or reconstructs an exalted man. An attempt to convey beyond realism may be unique, an interesting experiment, but it is not poetry. A success even would be a failure in that it would be "beyond" appreciation—beyond the intellect, the senses and the emotions.

Conveyance of impressions then is done through pictures, sound, colour—the senses and their wholly illogical reactions thereto. It is "imitative"; it contains "powerful feeling"; it is "imaginative"; it "transfigures"; the best has been "simple, sensuous and passionate"; in good poetry, seemingly, the simple suggest the profound; it is invariably "exalted" both in simplicity and dearth; it is repressed until the compression explodes in the mind of the appreciator. And, though we tend to recognize it at a glance, what is it? Shakespeare understanding

its undefinability defines it in poetry "gives airy nothings a local habitation and a name". I "feel" that he is right, but I can't prove it.

Col., U.S.A., Fort Douglas. CULLEN JONES.

POETRY AND INSTINCT

May I be permitted to enter into the discussion between Mr. Thomas Astore and Mr. Geoffrey Moore. I have read with interest the articles on Mr. Herbert Read's poems and am tempted to "butt-in" because of a statement made by Mr. Astore in his last letter, where he writes:

> ". . . I will conclude with the admission that I never had the opportunity of a college introduction to poetry, and have little or no knowledge of the technical terms or structures of a poem, but claim that I instinctively realize what are poems and also write them and know they are."

This is surely the most astonishing statement ever made from one who sets himself up as a poetic critic. I do not wish to undervalue Mr. Astore's judgment: in his choice of a number of "great" poems he clearly knows what great poems are. But I would respectfully suggest that judgment by instinct alone is not sufficient, and some knowledge of the technical terms and structure of poems is essential for their full appreciation and understanding. Judgment by instinct alone is as little likely to be successful as it was with Hitler when he led his army against the Russians.

I do not agree that the "Song of the Spanish Anarchists" is a great poem at all; I do not even think it is a good poem. My instinct tells me first that it is not, but if I am to make the statement at all I must say why. Here I must fall back on criticism of the choice of adjectives "golden", "green" and "strong" which are banal and void of meaning. Any book on the art of versification will show the importance of choice of adjectives. Secondly, though not lacking in melody, the poem is not sufficiently melodious to be great. Lastly, the meaning is not entirely clear.

Instinct, or sense of values in poetry, goes a long way towards judgment of poetry one readily admits; but it does not go all the way. I would say, for instance, that Walter de la Mare is a great poet but that instinct tells me he is somehow only very nearly a great poet. He just misses greatness. Why? The music and the melody of his poetry, his choice of words, and his elfin charm are unquestionable. But taking the poems as a whole, and not any one individually, their pervading atmosphere of dreaminess and fantasy veils the directness of thought. They are not so related to life as, say, Hardy's poems.

Speaking at random I would say that poems such as Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", Keats "On first looking into Chapman's Homer", Gray's "Elegy", Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" and many others are "great" poems. Instinct tells me first of all of their quality, and secondly they are technically perfect and have stood the test of time. Often enough time is the real test of greatness, not contemporary opinion. A poem thought great in one generation fades to second or third rank in the next generation. And in the reverse process a poem unhonoured and unsung in one decade can rise to a masterpiece in the next. It would not be so easy to choose "great" poems from the "modern" poetry. Our moderns have so flagrantly defied all the rules of poetry and ignored its beauties that, to my mind, they have little chance of achieving greatness. I would go so far as to say that no poem that is technically faulty is a great poem. It is the combination of all the qualities of good poetry that make greatness. And

instinct alone, without some technical knowledge of the structure of poetry, is insufficient. The label "great" is used far too glibly and with too little consideration of the qualities that make greatness.

Wolverhampton, May 31st. J. A. HIBBERT.

A COUNTERBLAST

(To Mr. Sibley's criticism of 'Intelligentsia')

Fie! Mr. Sibley, do you really mean
To class great Shelley with the minor poet,
To set our noble Dickens down between
Men of mere talent, vain poseurs who show it
In odd technique and odder garb? I ween
Genius may please itself, but those below it
Should flaunt no folly to be heard or seen;
Let us give honour where we owe it;
Your born intelligentsia, though keen
And clever, still are lesser men—and know it!
And why confront the British Philistine
With that peculiar charge, a "nasal whine"?

Tettenhall, Staffs. NANCY POLLOK.

BYRON AND SHELLEY

It has been the fate of these two great poets not only to enjoy a brief and intermittent friendship during their lives but to provoke endless controversy and comparison at the hands of posterity. Yet, discounting the obvious attraction of polarity, and the peculiar circumstances in which exile placed them both, the remarkable fact about their relationship is that it existed at all. It would have been difficult to find two more dissimilar beings, who derived not only enjoyment but stimulus from the company of one another.

I agree with Mr. Bebbington that time is ripe for Byron's poetry to receive new appreciation. His study was preeminently man in relation to society. A century has passed since he died fighting for liberty, but true liberty is not much nearer man's grasp than it was then. The first step towards its attainment is surely for everyone to learn to know himself first, and then society, in a way in which Byron knew both. While it is true that his death was his final gesture of defiance to his own egotism, it was also the only wholly selfless action of a tormented spirit. It was a symbolic challenge to those, who, knowing the self, can summon the courage to disregard it. Therefore he did not, as Miss Kernick would have us believe, shirk his sacred duty. While asserting that he did not *know* the ultimate truth, he expressed by his action his belief in its importance.

There are many searchers after truth whom Shelley bewilders. He is a poet's poet, and his particular form of truth is not easily to be attained by the average; though a large number of readers can enjoy his poetry purely from the aesthetic angle. Byron, his faults notwithstanding, is more readily understood by everyone and in his self-mockery helps us to laugh at ourselves. It must not be forgotten, however, that Shelley found Byron's poetry at moments sublime, that one of the letters Byron ever received was from Goethe, and that Walter Scott, that honest defender of the maligned, asserted that "Beauty such as Byron's has to be the indication of nobility of souls". In France it has been recognised that even noble souls have a *Nostalgie de la boue*. Byron admitted his; he plumbed the depths as

well as scaling the heights of human experience. Perhaps his greatest generosity lay in that admission. In his weakness he is near to every one of us, though more honest about it than most; for that we owe him a debt. For who can reach salvation without an awareness of the desperate nature of his need?

As for the character which "should have gone friendless to the grave", there is ample evidence that it showed a singular gift for retaining friendship. "My lord", remarked the man who knew him most intimately for most of his life, "may be odd, but he has such a good heart". Of his betrayal of Shelley even the evidence discussed by Edmund Blunden in his recent biography of Shelley, is not conclusive. Byron shocked Shelley by believing the Hoppner scandal, but it was not surprising that he should have refused to believe that Claire Claremont would be content to allow her relationship with Shelley to remain platonic, when Claire had so relentlessly pursued Byron himself. His inaction about the letter to the Hoppners did not contribute to Shelley's social ruin, even were it absolutely certain that he did not send it. Shelley's position in society was the result of his own fearless attitude, and owed nothing to Byron. That Shelley found Byron exhausting was not to be wondered at any more than that Byron was exasperated by Shelley's otherworldiness, and Mary's priggishness. Nevertheless they were as manna in the desert to one another in exile. Let us admit that they enriched one another, and acknowledge that both are necessary to our understanding of human destiny.

Hampstead, N.W.3. MARY ELIZABETH OAKE.

THE APPEAL OF POETIC PLAYS

I have read "Malvolio" with pleasure, and (as an unsuccessful competitor) I am rejoiced to see that you have given first place to a truly *poetic* play. I strongly —almost fanatically—support those who define "poetry" in terms which every poet from Homer to Tennyson would have understood, but which are little favoured nowadays.

Do I detect a vaguely apologetic note here and there in the editorial of the latest POETRY REVIEW, referring to poetic drama? I can assure you that audiences still enjoy poetry on the stage, if the play and the poetry are both worth seeing and listening to. Some years ago I wrote a one-act play in blank verse (i.e., pedantically accurate iambic pentameters, with perhaps one line in ten containing an extra syllable or a dactyl or anapaest to avoid monotony), using Elizabethan phrasing and conventions. It was produced in Ottawa, Canada, in 1937 and 1945 before audiences interested in amateur dramatics, and again in 1945 before a lay audience; just recently it was produced four times in Berlin, twice before a British military audience and twice before an American military audience. The reception it received on every occasion was sufficient to dispel any doubts as to the appeal of poetry to modern play-goers. The play which I entered in your recent contest, composed to equally rigid standards, was also staged in Ottawa about two months ago (in my absence) and enthusiastically received. I feel that, to quote your editorial, if the contest judges were "anxious for something in a newer idiom and ultra-modern in design or expression" they were somewhat misguided. In a hundred years the "newer" and "ultra-modern" scribblers will be ancient freaks, while Homer and Shakespeare will still enjoy perpetual youth. Whatever may be the fate of my writings, I prefer to walk a moment in step with Homer on Parnassus than to stumble with the "ultra-moderns" in their gloomy fens.

B.A.O.R., Berlin. J. M. MACLENNAN.

Shakespearian Emendations No. 2

As You Like It starts as follows, according to the First Folio:

> Orlando: As I remember Adam, it was upon this fashion bequeathed me by will, but poore a thousand Crownes, and as thou saist charged my brother on his blessing to breed mee well,

which, besides opening the play, gives the audience an inkling of what is to come; but the amplitude of their implications, which seem to be as follows, does not appear to have attracted comment. Orlando was a child when his father died, and, before the curtain went up, he had been endeavouring to recall the circumstances that led to his father leaving him only a thousand crowns. The charge, that his brother should breed him well, was not a clause in the will, but given verbally from his father's death-bed, and Adam, as an old and valued retainer, was privileged in being present at the end, and could therefore give the detail which Orlando had forgotten. Each had been contributing what he could to the sum of their mutual knowledge of matters leading to Orlando's present predicament.

Oliver was the eldest of the three sons, his father's favourite, and of good conduct, save for his envy of Orlando, resulting from the latter's all-round excellence eclipsing him in the popular estimation. This envy, leading to hatred, he must have concealed, or his father would not have made him Orlando's guardian. Even while he is plotting mortal injury for Orlando, he cannot help admiring him, to the extent that it seemed to him that, while Orlando was about, Oliver would never be properly appreciated. He was possessed by the laudable desire of winning "golden opinions from all sorts of people" but in a highly exaggerated form. Had he been gifted with more self-reliance, he would not have acted maliciously. His sin being the result of weakness more than wickedness, we welcome his reform later in the play and join with Orlando in forgiving him.

We must suppose Sir Rowland (the father) to have been a wealthy man, considering that his son should hold a thousand crowns in contempt, for such sum was then the equivalent of several thousand pounds to-day. Most commentators, the Cambridge included, are agreed that "he" should be interpolated before "bequeathed", but the Cambridge print it as "a", which is its Shakespearian substitute, and render the context as follows "it was upon this fashion: a' bequeathed me by will but poor thousand crowns", for, they say, "Dr. W. W. Greg (following Dyce) suggests (privately) that the 'a' of the clumsy 'poore a thousand' is the missing 'a' of Dyce's conjecture". But this transposition is merely robbing Peter to pay Paul, for, if "poor a thousand" is clumsy, "but poor thousand" is no improvement, and reads as if the thousand crowns were of poor quality and the number of thousands accidentally omitted. The word "privately" suggests Dr. Greg had his doubts; if so, they were well founded, for undoubtedly "a" has been misplaced in the Folio and should be reinstated to precede "poore", but as editors are not unanimous about it, I will proceed to justify my "emphaticism".

Later in the scene, Orlando again shows his discontent with the sum he is due to receive under his father's will, by referring to it as "the poor allottery", which, if "poor a thousand" is correct, should have appeared as "poor the allottery", both "a" and "the" being grammatical "articles". Also, Timon of Athens, IV, 2, 50, Flavius, finding his old master destitute, referring to his own money, says to him:

I beg of you—
Whilst *this poor wealth* lasts,
To entertain me as your steward still,

and so we have a trio, all emphatic on the poverty of wealth ("poor thousand crowns; poor allottery, and poor wealth"), and all agreed (see on) that "poor" should immediately precede the noun it qualifies.

The Warwick accepts "but poor a thousand" and quotes in its favour "With more tame a tongue"(Meas. for Meas. ii.2.46), but that is not a true analogy, for "but a poor thousand crowns" is a complete statement, whereas "With more tame a tongue" is only the subjective half of a comparison, and therefore incomplete without the addition of "than" followed by the objective. In the two phrases under review the respective meanings are "Only a paltry thousand crowns" and "With a tamer tongue than that which you should have used". Irving and Jagger both print "poor a thousand" without comment, so it would appear they accepted the First Folio's version unquestionably. Chas. Knight gave evidence in favour of "but a poor thousand crowns", for he states it so reads in the 1632 Folio, yet, strange to say, he did not follow the correction. The change is so desirable that we can unhesitatingly accept the later Folio on this occasion, as being a considered emendation.

Later in his speech, Orlando says Oliver's horses "are bred better (better educated)—are taught their manage (given proper training) and to that end riders dearly hired; but I (his brother) gain nothing under him but growth"; and he "mines my gentility with my education", meaning *lack* of education. From this, it is evident Orlando regrets his lack of education, and I read into it, and the quotation I will now give, a personal note of the poet, for a few lines on Oliver says of Orlando, that he is

gentle, never schooled and yet learned,
full of noble device, of all sorts en-
chantingly beloved, and indeed so much
in the heart of the world.

This is so eminently applicable to Shakespeare himself that it is worthy to have formed his epitaph, and I like to imagine we have here his miniature, drawn by his own hand; the more valuable, as he reveals himself so seldom in his works. Both his characters stress the importance of education, and the poet, through Orlando, voices his regret at the scantiness of his own training; but would he have benefited by a classical education? I think, while he was imbibing more Latin and far more Greek, he would have missed acquiring much of his other knowledge, of which he made such phenomenal use, and that his example proves that budding genius, after fifteen or so, may safely be left to develop and flourish in whatsoever way it can.

Hove. HOWARD PARSONS.

A revised and abridged edition for schools of *Les Grands Lyriques Anglais,* the first *bilingual* Anthology (English-French) of English poetry from Shakespeare to modern times, selected and rendered into French verse with substantial biographical and critical notices by Felix Rose, contributor to *The Journal of Education, The Poetry Review,* etc., author of *Tennyson and Victor Hugo, two poets, two nations, one epoch,* with an introduction by Professor G. Rudler, Professor of French Literature at Oxford University, is about to appear.

The Premium Editor's Report

THREE COMPELLING POEMS

I PERCEIVE that it is again time to remind competitors of my request that their poems should be typewritten. Those who continue to ignore my desire can hardly expect me to apportion to them an undue share of my fully occupied time, or to feel encouraged to disentangle their gems of poesy from what is often a barely legible scrawl. Few of us indeed realise that our handwriting, so legible to us, may offer difficulty to another and, in that, it does not differ from our obscurities in verse, although these are upon another plane. I should also be glad to be spared more of those odd scraps of paper, not precisely the backs of envelopes, but almost as carelessly informal, which some of my aspirants feel are good enough for their efforts. They are not good enough for me, however, for they are liable to go missing, are difficult to handle and, by their meagre and casual presentation, the poems which they bear are more difficult to assess correctly. I am always glad to observe a poet's efforts to show me his poem in a manner complimentary to us both. There is a dignity about it not at all out of place in this competition nor perhaps is it less than my due in an arduous and exacting task.

But before I proceed let me return for a moment to typewriting. I hesitate to make a hard and fast condition of this since there do exist, even to-day, circumstances which debar some of our members from access to a machine or to a typing bureau. These entries I would not wish to exclude in order to apply forcible persuasion to those who live in large towns but are too indolent or too economical to avail themselves of their urban facilities. Therefore I leave it still to your sense of what is fitting for a competition of this importance, and with a lingering hope of more general consideration, but do use a uniform size of paper, on one side only.

Poetry being what it is, an affair primarily of temperament and character and of intellect only secondarily, it is interesting to observe how seldom those whose habit of mind is revealed by these casual slovenlinesses achieve any noteworthy success in this contest. I have not yet penalised anyone for such things although there is no way entirely to redress the handicap which they impose upon themselves. Poetry is after all a thing of rhythm, requiring visual ease, and is of more difficult comprehension than ordinary communication, and in the plainest of print can be difficult. It may be, of course, that the neglect to expend the small sum necessary for typing is sometimes due to the fear that the poem is not worth the outlay. If such is the case please do not send it to me. I am not likely to think better of it than you do.

Looking back at the premium reports for which I have been responsible during the last year or two, I am almost embarrassed to observe how free I have been with advice as to how you might best come at that mystery, poetry. If I had confined my precepts to the mastering of the art of versification, that is to say, its technical part, I should have felt less presumptuous than I do; but the temptation to rush in where angels might feel nervous has been as constantly irresistible to me as the resulting doubt of my fitness for any such course has been inevitable, and I have had really no option but to persevere in it.

I take some comfort from the fact that in a recent volume of the Letters of Rilke I found confirmation of much of the theory which it has seemed to me must be put into practice for the evocation of poetry. For poetry is evoked not

written, felt not composed, inspired not thought out; and the achievement of poetry therefore requires, first, a very unmodern subjectivity of mind, and second, a monumental patience to await the moment before making the endeavour.

I use the word "unmodern" in relation to any subjective mental process, since to-day it has become fashionable to regard an objective habit of mind as the sign of an enlightened and balanced intellect: and to-day we worship intellect as never before in our history. That is, of course, why we no longer produce great poets or great artists of any sort. Those who wish to practise an art must to-day travel further and expend more effort to escape into that dim hinterland of consciousness where inspiration waits. The artist is handicapped from the start as he never was in days when, for all their turbulence, the material side of life was less insistent and less absorbing than it is now.

It is this change or development of human society which is, of course, responisble for so much of the "modern" work which is inflicted upon us, and which at times we ourselves inflict upon others. The incomprehensible type of poetry is, of course, nothing but an ersatz attempt to simulate the voice of inspiration upon a feverish plane. But there is another kind of poetry, so-called, which many of you are guilty of, which is the sort you feel impelled to write from an inadequate impulse, which may be, and often is, no more than a mental conception. And then there is the third kind which some of you play with sometimes, but which in the main you reject, and that is the poetry of the completely defeated, wherein there is neither emotional content nor music nor prosodic form.

How many true poems can one expect to write in a year? The answer of course varies from person to person, but for the vast majority of us the number must be small indeed, and, so far as my experience goes, is so; for one of the hardest things for anyone alive to-day and under the necessity of earning his daily bread is that he will be able to indulge himself in those long trance-like dreams which are essential if one is to make contact with anything eternal.

It is this which I want to underline and emphasise in this report. Poetry is the offspring of a habit not of mind but of spirit. It is, in short, a matter of character and not of ability, although one would expect ability of a high order in a good poet. But it is significant that, the moment human cleverness makes its ugly appearance in a poem, the spirit which should kindle that poem becomes dull, and the reader himself alienated. That is why I belabour the point so, in report after report, that poetry must be simple. "Be humble, sweet poet, and let who will be clever" for, if you cannot sink into the profounder depths of your own consciousness, for heaven's sake do not attempt to supply the deficiency, from your mental warehouse. The lover of poetry is a wary bird, and will not be caught with chaff; and the only real excuse for the poetic forms, with their intrinsic difficulty of perusal, is that they should be the vehicle of something better than the doubtful treasure of the mind; that they should be reserved for the clothing of beauty such as is not upon this earth within the compass of the senses or of the mind, but which, by some mystery, the spirit of the artist may capture from the timeless and fix in time by the magic of his words, his colours or his music.

So much for my homily. To say that it is provoked by many of your entries this time is to say nothing more than the expected, but some things bear repetition, in fact need reiteration if they are to be assimilated in their full significance.

The award is again divided, this time among three competitors. The winner—the poet receiving the major sum (£5)—is Miss CATHERINE FORBES, of Amersham, whose poem "The Reaper" draws an analogy, not entirely original,

between a hayfield and the sea, but does it with a fresh fidelity and a sustained grace which results in a fine poem of memorable quality, and certainly follows the precepts which I have just enunciated. Here it is:

I SAW a meadow high with grass
And undulating like the sea,
The summer sea where slowly pass
Great cloudy shadows lazily,
And where the same warm-scented breeze
Rolls the long waves with liquid ease.

Like flecks of foam, white marguerites
Rode on the grassy grey-green swell,
And buttercups in golden sheets
Like sunny patches rose and fell,
And poppies showed like corals red
Swept upward from the sandy bed.

When, moving with a watery wake,
A horse-drawn reaper slowly made
The grassy wave bend down and break
And fall like foam beneath the blade,
And there the flowery swathes did lie
Like sea-pools coloured from the sky.

And down the deep glass-fronted wave
Dark splendid colours glowed between
The liquid stalks, ruby and brown,
Purple and gold and deep-sea green,
All swaying slow from side to side
Like sea weeds moving with the tide.

Hour after hour the white clouds blew
Across the sunny skies of June,
Hour after hour the flood withdrew
Through morning, noon, and afternoon,
Tossing and tumbling yet, though far
As seas on the horizon are.

And when at evening-time I passed
It was as though the ebbing tide,
Slowly receding had at last
Left the great foreshore bare and wide,
And on the field the reaper lay
Like some ship stranded in the bay.

Like some black ship that sails no more,
Empty and idle and undone,
Lying, long-shadowed on the shore
Before the golden setting sun,

And the great flood it rode all day
Secretly stolen far away.

The second place (and £3) is taken by Miss RACHEL BATES, of Sawrey, near Ambleside. This competitor sent me two poems and both achieved a "highly commended", a rare thing. And yet it was not for this sufficient reason that I award her a portion of the premium, but because her poem "Release", by its own power evokes in me the authentic emotions which compelled its author to write it.

THE winter of my thought recedes
With its constricting ice and snow—
Full late by nature's reckoning
Whose emerald winds around me blow;
But now at last the prisoned springs
Begin to stir, begin to flow.

What sudden magic, then, prevailed
To melt inclemency away?
I heard the curlew rise and spill
Her liquid notes above the grey
Fell-tops, I heard the warbler lift
His high sweet piping all the day.

I saw the primrose light a pale
Clear flame about the woodland floor,
The apple-tree incline her white
And rosy cheek beside my door;
In fountains of new gold I saw
The gorse leap up along the moor.

And yet it was nor wing nor flower
Nor any voice of summer's range
That made my wintry becks to fill,
That brought my season to its change—
But something warm and proud and free
Kindling a look half-known, half-strange.

And thirdly I award £2 to Mr. E. J. WORTHINGTON, of Rossett, near Wrexham, for his poem "The Caterpillars". This expresses very deftly another analogy, the secret of which is kept, however, until the final couplet rams the lesson home with a strength and economy which leaves one entirely satisfied:

HE that has curled his sober way through life
From leaf to tender leaflet gently weaving,
And sought no greedy gain by harmful strife,
His brief companions of this life was leaving:
In dumb, slow-grasping grief they clustered round
Bewildered and forlorn by parting's sorrow—
And little comfort for their loss they found
That were too wise to credit heaven's to-morrow:
His stiff, brown chrysalis they sadly laid

Under the kindly earth that now had cherished
His youth, his age, his end: They were afraid
Each, for the time when he, too, should have perished.
But he they mourned brake forth on gorgeous wing
Magnificent past their imagining.

The Highly Commended and Commended lists which follow are given as usual in alphabetical order.

Highly Commended :

T. E. Casson, Pennington
J. S. Cox, Auckland, N.Z.
Marjorie J. Martyn, Stroud
Roberta Shuttleworth, Guildford

Commended :

D. L. Bowen, Knighton
F. T. Bratton, Wallingford
Bruce Burton, Birmingham, 30
Pte. L. Butcher, Twickenham
E. B. Champkin, London, W.2
Beryl Davies, Gilwern
G. M. Dawson, Salisbury, Rhodesia
C. E. J. Fryer, Maidstone
B. R. Gibbs, Upminster
Margaret Greaves, Winchcombe
D. G. Hopkins, Wrexham
Erna Jackson, Buxton
Nesta Martin, Romford
Thomas Morgan McGurk, Edinburgh, 3
Dr. A. C. Nash, Hollyburn, B.C.
J. H. Ormsby, Nacton
Stellanova Osborn, Sault Ste Marie, Mich.
Lucy Rochelle, Sheffield, 4
Harry Sefton, Lytham
Muriel Spark, London, W.2
Ruth Waldram, Pinner
Doris Westwood, Sutton Coldfield
J. I. Winch, Osterley
John Pudsey Wright, Dunkirk, Kent

The usual premium offer for the best poem or poems submitted to the Premium Editor during the month (without limitation of subject) is now stabilised at £10 per issue. Not more than two lyrics or one long poem should be submitted. MSS. should reach "The Premium Editor, THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," by August 30th accompanied by stamped addressed envelope, and if criticism is desired, 5s. should be sent. It is essential that entrants to this competition be members of The Poetry Society or registered subscribers to THE POETRY REVIEW, and that each poem bears the name and address of the author marked "For Premium Competition."

An "Ancient Prophecy", translated from Gray's "Luna Habitabilis", Cambridge, 1737:

"The time will come, when thou shall lift thine eyes
To watch a long-drawn battle in the skies
While aged peasants, too amazed for words,
Stare at the flying fleets of wondrous birds
England, so long the mistress of the sea,
Where winds and waves confess her sovereignty,
Her ancient triumphs yet on high shall bear,
And reign, the sovereign of the conquered air."

The Holmes Prize for Poems of Place

AWARD AND COMMENT

ADEQUATELY extensive comment would number the contestants from 1 to 100, print the conditions of the contest in *capital italics*, and then deploy the one against the other with the relentless, implacable and icy logic of Euclid or Einstein in discarding those mathematical pleasantries that are not worthy of the signature Q.E.D. To paraphrase, one may be able to avoid some of the conditions some of the time, but one CANNOT avoid ALL the conditions ALL of the time. Some contestants only troubled to read the heading of the competition, but even if this were only casually scanned it should have been fairly obvious that the words POEMS of PLACE had a certain significance.

As a capacity for criticism of one's work is probably in inverse ratio to its quality one can tolerate, without condoning, the absence of poetry; but one cannot accept with equanimity nondescript verses whose only qualification appears to be a hastily added title plucked from the Bradshaw of memory. Fortunately there were rather more than 100 poems.

The constant warnings, advice and rebukes of the Premium Editor continue, I fear, to fall on minds and ears bemused with what the writers think they are saying and never appreciating that an alien mind has to recover from the written word, the virginal creative thought and emotion. The archaic word inducing scansion, the aged cliché, the second-hand image, and the immature alliteration renders this task not only impossible but wearisome. It is such a matter for regret when one senses a sincere emotion straining for unusual utterance and finding it clothed in shabby reach-me-downs. Every accent, every word, line and phrase must not only count and fit and be the best obtainable, but must carry the evocative scent delightfully peculiar to the poem, the place and the author.

It is an interesting speculation to what extent the impact of strange and remote places on the mind and emotion differs from that engendered by the place where one abides with great content. Never before have so many lived for years in strange and alien lands with the sombre background of a searching war plaguing each mind. Here, the majority of the entries concerned the places where their lives had taken root; yet, and perhaps naturally, the poems took the mood, the thoughts, the faith, the love "inspired" within the poet; whilst the competition called for a poem redolent of somewhere that, to the writer, meant the texture of life itself conveying its quality, its grace, its grandeur, its fair ordinariness, its appeal, its difference, or its felt loss to the reader.

Generally speaking the natural medium for a place poem, with its overwhelming emotional appeal, is the song or lyric. The sonorous majestic lines of Dante and Milton treat of places that do not, I think, come within the ambit of this competition. Yet, an ordinary village; daybreak in the Himalayas; or under the clock at Victoria Station could hardly be encompassed within the same verse forms.

It is a curious fact that ebullient, effervescent, sparkling gaiety is rarely attempted and seldom comes off. At the other end of the scale, the awful majesty of the natural scene is more commonly the motivating inspiration, but is also the more intimidating to the tyro. For most, the reflective, contemplative, nostalgic sadness is the prevailing mood and the main danger is the descent into sentimentality and bathos.

Perhaps these remarks can be read not only in connection with the competition just concluded but also with the ones to come, for they can become a memorable

sequence of memories linking, by poetry, man and his settlements on the earth.

Now for the award. The first is "The Vale of Avalon" by Thomas M. McGurk (Edinburgh). This poem can be dissected and criticised in many ways, but the overall impression is one of imaginative beauty created by thoughtful craftsmanship. Other poems are each in their several ways unusual and special in the sense of the terms of reference. "Trincomalee after Dark" achieves a maximum of vision with a modicum of words; "Skokholm" gives a cinematic effect that is strikingly colourful; Keith Brace does not allow his 17½ years to restrict his subject or restrain his imagination, whilst Eric Peters renders the historic past gracefully and more classically. The "Victoria Falls" makes a splendid effort to convey the intensity of the impact on the mind of that tremendous spectacle and, in quite a different way, "Cloud End" presents the terrific subject of dawn in the Himalayas. John Buxton's "The Isles of Scilly" is quiet and restrained in comparison, but very effective, and to this and to Francis Stephenson's "Skokholm" we award the 2nd prize. Perhaps another year we may be able to add a fresh appendix to Longfellow's comprehensive anthology of poems of place and Mrs. Alice Hunt Bartlett's City Anthology which grew out of a notable POETRY REVIEW competition.

Highly Commended :

Keith Brace, Newport, Mon.
A. E. L. Cooper, West Lavington, Wilts.
Eric Peters, London, W.1
B. M. Smoker, London, S.E. 6.
Muriel Spark, London, W.2

Commended :

D. L. Allsop, London, S.W.1
P. M. Bower, Brighton
T. E. Casson, Ulverston, Lancs.
Joan Gaved, Par, Cornwall
Mrs. Craik Henderson, Glasgow
Redvers H. King, London, W.C.1
C. L. Lanyon, Farnham, Surrey
J. H. Loudon-Shand, Cranleigh
P. E. C. Lyth, London, S.W.13
T. Pawsey, Oxford
Edgar Proudman, Painswick, Glos.
Lt.-Col. W. T. Shorthose, B.A.O.R.
Susan Torrey, King's Lynn
Muriel Symmons, Salcombe
J. Winch, Osterley, Middlesex

Robert Browning—Elizabeth Barrett Marriage Centenary

Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett were married in St. Marylebone Church on 12th September, 1846.

The Poetry Society is associating itself with the celebrations, which are being held in Marylebone to mark the centenary, and with the purpose of the Rector of St. Marylebone to build a Browning Memorial Chapel at the church where that most romantic and happy marriage was solemnized.

On the day itself there is to be a service in the church at 5.15 p.m., at which the address will be given by a distinguished public man; the Earl of Lytton will give a short reading from Robert Browning's works, and the Duchess of Wellington, one of our foremost women poets, will read two of Elizabeth Barrett's "Sonnets from the Portuguese". The service will be open to all, but if members will apply to the Poetry Society, tickets will be sent which will ensure seats being reserved for them.

On Tuesday, September 10th, the Mayor of St. Marylebone will hold a

reception in the Town Hall at 5 p.m. Lord Kennet will speak, and Sir Ronald Storrs will give a reading from Robert Browning, and Margaret Rawlings from Elizabeth Barrett. The Mayor will be very pleased to send a card of invitation to any members of the Poetry Society who may inform the Secretary of the Society of their wish to attend. At their meeting the plans of the proposed Browning Chapel, designed by Mr. Michael Tapper, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., will be on view.

The Rector of St. Marylebone has prepared an illustrated brochure entitled "Old Marylebone and Some of its Famous People", which tells the story of Marylebone from its early days when it was known as Tybourn, and of some of the people, including the Brownings, who had associations with the church. This brochure (price 2s. 6d.) is being published and distributed by Simpkin Marsall (1941) London, and is obtainable from all booksellers. The proceeds will go to the Centenary Fund (of which Lord Kennet is the treasurer), the main purpose of which is to provide money for the building of the Chapel.

Messrs. Raphael Tuck are producing a Browning calendar at Christmas, and have generously arranged to give whatever profit there may be to the Centenary Fund. The picture on the calendar, which depicts Elizabeth Barrett's room at 50 Wimpole Street, has been specially painted by Mr. Adrian Allinson, whose work will be well known to many of those who attend the Exhibition at the Royal Academy each year.

The Home of Lord Tennyson becomes a Guest House

Farringford, less than a mile from Freshwater, the Isle of Wight home of Lord Tennyson, which was purchased in September, 1944, by British Holiday Estates Ltd., has been turned into an exclusive guest house which will cater for not more than twenty-five guests. The house has been modernized to present-day standards without losing the individuality it acquired from its illustrious owner. Special care has been exercised to retain, as far as possible, recollections and relics of Lord Tennyson. Certain rooms, such as the Library, are as he left them. The house is surrounded by gardens and lawns in an estate covering 365 acres, commanding a magnificent view of the Island's scenery.

Farringford was first rented by Tennyson in November 1853 and the freehold purchased by him in 1856. He was attracted to it by the isolation of the west end of the Island, which was then very thinly populated and little visited from the mainland, and by the seclusion of the house, among the copses and sloping parkland which screened it from view almost every side. A number of his most famous works were written at Farringford, including Maud (1855) (with the proceeds of which he purchased the estate) the volume of the *Idylls of the King* issued in 1859 and *Enoch Arden and other Poems* issued in 1864. Until 1872 his library and writing-room was the small north-east room on the top floor, but in that year he built the large library on the south side, with the ballroom underneath and the turret staircase leading up from the conservatory, which provided him with a way of escape from unwelcome visitors coming up the front staircase. The north and south wings of the house were connected by small additions and some internal improvements effected after the death of Hallam, Lord Tennyson, in 1928.

The poet was very fond of writing in the summerhouse which looks southward over Maiden's Croft, and this was decorated by him with his own hand with paintings, most of which have unfortunately been destroyed owing to the decomposition of the plaster. He had the platform on the roof constructed in order that

he might study the stars, as he was greatly interested in astronomy. His bedroom and that of his wife were on the north side of the first floor. It was his custom after dinner to have dessert laid in the small room next to the conservatory and he would adjourn there and drink his port, afterwards adjourning to the drawing room, or to his library to smoke and compose.

"POETS AT WAR"—REPLY TO MISS SMYTHEMAN

We lived indeed with beauty and with death
And wrote of what we saw, but not as you
With sickly tale of "Nature's honeyed breath"—
We spoke the life we lived, the life we knew.
We saw beneath the shell of so-called peace
A brute neglect of human want and pain,
And strove to bring the straining world release
From grappling need for use and greed for gain.
We lived the dawning life of coming birth
And knew the labour-pains that needs must be,
Yet saw beyond the womb of Mother Earth
Mankind firm—stood in conscious unity.
Grudge not the throes of necessary strife
But learn through them the wider scale of life.

Auckland, N.Z. DICK SOUTHON.

Verse writers and speakers will be intrigued by the announcement of Vox Recordists. "Vox" is an unique enterprise, combining as it does the functions of a recording studio with modern electric apparatus, and a musical and literary service embracing composing, lyric writing, arranging, singing and verse-reading. The aim of "Vox" is to enable anyone who has composed either music or verse to procure a first-class gramophone record of their work, sung or read by experienced artists, merely by sending a typescript or manuscript copy through the post. In addition, whenever required, suitable verses will be set to music, the resultant song being recorded if required. Behind "Vox" are Ranald and Anthea Porteous, who between them have considerable experience of broadcasting, both singing and drama. Mr. Porteous (until recently Squadron Leader, R.A.F.) has been an occasional contributor to *The Poetry Review*, and does most of the lyric-writing and a fair proportion of the singing for "Vox", while Mrs. Porteous is known in Southern Africa, where they have lived for some years, as the composer of the very successful song "Nyasa" and the Rhodesian Victory song, "The Last Battle". She is said to have an uncanny flair for capturing the spirit of verse in the music which she composes to it.

I enclose cheque for one guinea as subscription, with my apologies for the long delay in renewing it, for I know how difficult it must be to carry on the work of the Society in wartime. It must, however, be a great encouragement that so much more interest is being shown in poetry at the present time, and both now and in the stern years that face us after the war, it will be needed as never before to balance our material world with a little of those things of beauty and of the spirit, without which "there is no vision," without which "the people perish." Matthew Arnold's words, the Society's motto, show very truly the value of the work of The Poetry Society, and I wish you every support and success, indeed, that motto could with great benefit be more widely digested: J. M. EASTCOTT, Halesworth, May 21st.

Parting

SO came the hour, unwanted, unbelieved,
Whereto each moment of our love had sped.
We smiled, and talked of other things instead:
Of past delight—of hope not yet achieved,
Until we could no longer be deceived.
"It will be easier if you go," you said.
And so I left you, holding high my head,
And looked not back, lest you should see I grieved.
But had I turned, and seen your watchful eyes,
Would they not then have made their message plain?
"Beloved, I can do no otherwise,
"Else were our loving false—my striving vain."
And would I not, from myriad replies,
Have found but one? "Come back to me again!"

Cassandra Page-Turner.

Faithful Unto Death

GREAT Love great tragedy inspires,
Through what vicissitudes it moves,
It burns in its consuming fires
The soul which most profoundly loves;
Its ecstasy all else transcends,
There never was a world so sweet,
But when the brief enchantment ends,
No desolation so complete.

Lovers have lived, and lost, and sighed,
In secret shed life's saddest tear,
For love ill-fated which has died
Its marriage-bed a lonely bier.
Death, death, alone can Love eclipse,
As each unhappy lover dies,
A name is trembling on their lips
A face is mirror'd in their eyes.

Leslie Green.

Spring Hat 1946

INDOLENT Aristocrat
of deep disturbances, this hat.
From its fabric, close and curled,
poor sad symbols of my world
Wave and flutter. Ribbons may
tether me to every day.
Frail the veil that constantly
hides my fellow men from me.
Poised with wings wide-spreading, I,
this mute bird that will not fly.

Muriel Spark.